BRAHMANISM

A POLITICAL CONCEPT

NEERJA DHAWAN

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NEERJA DHAWAN

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To

Dr M. M. Verma

my father, my inspiration

To The Reader

Brahmanism as a political concept has not attracted the attention of historians and political writers. Although I claim no originality in dealing with this subject, yet I have made a few useful observations. A study of ancient Indian history would remain incomplete without an understanding of the role of Brahmans, yet very little work has been done to highlight their political status.

Most of the books on Brahmans signify their social action. These actions were primarily motivated by structurally given demands, i.e., norms, expectations, taboos, responsibilities, etc., associated with their given social position.

While analysing the political role of the Brahmans (the spiritual masters) it is imperative to know the socio-religious conditions of that time. The law of varna-ashrama-dharma which is the basis of the ancient Hindu society, has to be interpreted in the true spirit.

The Brahman in the varnashrama scheme is to lead the life of renunciation, live on barest subsistence allowance and occupy the most honoured position in the social hierarchy. The general tendency of men of all classes is to strive for the summit due to their impression that the position at the top is one of pleasure, power and profit. To obtain these, everyone wishes to climb the social ladder. But in the Hindu scheme, life becomes more difficult as we rise high. A Brahman should do nothing for the sake of enjoyment. If an individual attains higher level of social responsibility and the diminution of personal enjoyments, he rises in the social ladder. He will find real satisfaction with his own place and work in the society. Those who seek higher place will lead a life of simplicity and self-denial.

A study of the ancient Hindu society shows that the Brahmans were closely connected with the traditional culture in which they enjoyed a supreme position. As spiritual elite the Brahmans guided the kings, dominated political assemblies, judicial processes, religious and social activities.

The Brahmans find an exalted place in the Brahmanical literature and the Manusmriti.

The present study is conceptual and not a description of events or illustration of actual historical conditions. Although concrete facts of history do help in theorisation, yet in the case of ancient India there is an ocean of religious and philosophical literature which help us interpret the concepts. The study of Brahmanism as a political concept is not an illustration of particular persons in a certain age.

While working on this subject, I came across divergent interpretations made by historians and sociologists. Scholars on ancient India seldom agree with each other regarding the chronology of ancient political thinkers. Some confusion arises because the scholars have not been able to see differences between historical and theoretical works. Books that are normative and didactic in character are believed to be yielding genuine facts of history.

The conclusions drawn in the book are rather tentative. A more thorough and investigative probe might reveal other interesting aspects of the subject. I have attempted to provide not so much an account of the facts, or a chronicle of events, as an essay of interpretations. A sincere attempt has been made to collect useful material from numerous scattered sources in order to provide an unbiased interpretation of the subject. I shall be content if the study provokes a deeper thinking.

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Introduction

A study of the political concepts and traditions in ancient India requires an understanding of the cultural and social framework of that age. Although the span of creative thinking was a large one yet it revealed a remarkable continuity in the formation of political concepts and institutions. This is particularly true when we trace the genesis and development of ancient Indian political vocabulary and institutions and the forces which helped their growth. For example, Manu, the great law-giver, gave to the tradition a general form which finally crystallized later in Kautilya's work. Thereafter the stream of thought remained practically unchanged.

An attempt to analyse political concepts of ancient Hindus is bound to run into difficulties in the face of intrusion of modern concepts into ancient theories. There is a general tendency to justify the latter in the context of the former. A common approach followed by scholars in such studies is to resort to ancient literature as a source of modern political ideas.

Some aspects of the ancient theories may be of some interest and relevance to modern times but the best way for a researcher is to project himself into the past in order to be more objective in his analysis. This, undoubtedly, is a difficult task to achieve but there is no alternative methodology. At times, ideas of the past have a similarity with those of the present in the same way that there is some scope for comparing eastern and western political thought systems.

The period extending from the fourth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. was a crucial epoch in ancient Indian history. It witnessed significant socio-economic developments, remarkable religious efflorescence and kaleidoscopic political changes characterised by foreign invasions and settlement of foreigners as a dominant section of the ruling aristocracy, which exercised a considerable impact on the existing social order.

In fact, the period holds key to the understanding of the entire earlier and subsequent social history of India. The Manusmriti and the Yajnavalkyasmriti, which were among the monumental products of this age, formulated partly under the influence of earlier Vedic and Upanishadic traditions and partly under the impact of the contemporary conditions, expounded a system of norms and values which inspired and regulated the way of life and social movements during the succeeding centuries and continue to do so even now.

The Satapatha Brahman says, "To the king doubtless belongs the Rajasuya, for by offering the Rajasuya he becomes king, and unsuited for kingship is the Brahman".[1] It is true that the Brahmans claimed to be gods of the earth, but inspite of all vaunted claims they remained, both in theory and practice, advisors, councillors or at best ministers, but they never claimed to be the supreme decision-makers in things political.[2]

However, from the sociological point of view, it can be argued that the Brahmans were handicapped in the exercise of political power due to the reason that they had no independent source of income and largely depended on the king for their living. Financially, they were dependent on the king and other landed and commerical leaders. Thus, it was not possible for them to galvanize any strong front for purposes of acquiring political power or organizing effective political resistance.

A study like this which covers centuries of thought and action, has its own limitations. First, the want of a chronological data which could make it more precise and accurate. The chronological difficulty centers round the ancient literature upon which is based our knowledge of the most ancient Indian thinkers and the ages that intervened between them. Not only are the ages in which the earliest literature like the Vedas, the Aranyakas and the Samhitas that give us a glimpse of the ancient Indian political thought, still a subject of speculation, but the periods separating them and the writings of the master thinkers like Manu are also a matter of chronological uncertainty.

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[1] Sat Br. I. 1. 12.

[2] Keith, *Cambridge History of India,* Vol. I,P. 95: "The Vedic Purohita was the forerunner of the Brahman statesman....there is no reason to doubt that a Visvamitra or a Vasistha was a most important element of the government of the early Vedic realm".

Added to the above difficulty is the one which pertains to authenticity of political authorship. The problem is made more complicated by the wide divergence of opinion among scholars. For example, the existence of one or more Manus, and the views expressed by some that Manu was of a comparatively later date. The same difficulty arises about the date of the Kautilya's Arthasastra.

It is indeed difficult to apply the socio-historical method of analysis to any study on ancient Indian concepts. It is well-nigh impossible to describe in a chronological manner the main schools of ancient Indian political thought. Besides, the difficulties relating to limitations of the entire study of ancient political thought there is another problem of searching for materials in the alluring list of teachers often mentioned in the ancient texts.

A number of valuable works, covering various aspects of the social history of our period are available. Apart from the works like Kane's *'tour de force'*, *'History of the Dharmasastra'*, Ghoshal's excellent chapters on social and economic history in *'A Comprehensive History of India'*, Vol. II (ed. by K.A.N. Sastri) which supplement his *'History of Indian Public Life'*,Vol. II and K.V.Rangaswami Aiyangar's *'Aspects of Social and Political System of Manusmriti'* and *'Some Aspects of Hindu View of Life According to Dharmasastras'*etc., a few notable works by historians of the present generation have also appeared. R.S. Sharma's 'Sudras in Ancient India', B.N. Puri's 'India in the *Time of Patanjali'* and *'India Under the Kushanas'*,

S. Chattopadhyaya's *'Social Life in Ancient India'* and *'Kusana Studies'* edited by G.R. Sharma are some of the more important examples. Besides, there are a large number of works on the history of the caste system. A.N. Bose's *Social and Rural Economy of Northern India* is a class by itself.

Despite the existence of these works, very little study has been done on Brahmanism as a political concept in ancient India. It prompted the author to enter the field left largely uncovered by eminent indologists.

The source material available for the present study are large and varied. One has naturally to depend most on the Smritis of Manu, Yajnavalkya, Visnu, Narada, Brihaspati and the precepts of the epics. On the assumption that social institutions and habits, especially in ancient India, changed slowly, the use of the Arthasastra of Kautilya, even though it might have been composed during the Mauryan period is unavoidable. These works not only supply the theoretical framework but also are of great help in reconstructing the realities of the social set-up.

The drama and kavya literature of the period, the plays and works of Bhasa, Asvaghosa and Kalidasa, are also helpful , even though the themes centre round mainly royalty and aristocracy. The technical works like the Mahabhasya of Patanjali, the Samhitas of Caraka and Susruta, the Kamasutra of Vatsyayana etc., offer valuable information. The Buddhist and the Jain literature,especially the Milindapanha, the Mahavastu, the Divyavadana, the Saddharma-Pundarika, etc., contain a wealth of information. An extremely useful work is the Jain text Angavijja.

Besides the Puranas materials, there are classical sources like the accounts of Megasthenes, Strabo's *Geography, Pliny's Natural History* and the anonymous Greek Sailors. The periplus of the Erythrean Sea are of great value, especially for the economic aspects of the society. For the reconstruction of the material aspects of life, excavation reports, specially of such key sites as Taxila, Kausambi, Hastinapur, Kumrahar etc., are of great value and significance.

A study of the various schools, particularly those of Manu,Brihaspati, and Usanas before the age of the Mahabharata, would convince any one that we have to refer to pre-Mahabharatan times as the formative period in the development of ancient Indian political thought. The existence of various schools at different times clearly suggests that theorisation was not confined to some persons or to a particular age but was spread over hundreds of years.

The limitations and difficulties in the field of this study, notwithstanding, the resources of ancient Indian literature, myths, legends, philosophy, theology, art and science can be usefully tapped to define with precision, certain concepts like Brahmanism and discover the role of Brahmans in the political system in ancient India.

The present enquiry is divided into six parts, including the concluding chapter. An effort has been made to provide not so much an account of facts or a chronicle of events, but an essay of interpretations. The work strives to minimize the traditional bias. Although a survey of varied approaches has been attempted yet efforts have also been made to keep pace with the description provided by the original sources.

In chapter I, different connotations of the varna-ashrama-dharma theory — orthodox, modern, eastern, and western are dealt with. In ancient Hindu literature dharma is a cohesive element on the human plane — it is the principle of organization. In the light of the true meaning of the law of varna the place of the Brahmans in the varna-hierarchy is also pointed out.

In chapter 2 genesis of the terms Brahman and Brahmanism has been made. Though the sources of investigation are of a secondary nature — yet the illustrations do not lose sight of records in the original sources. Illustrations are designed to shed light on the problems that have arisen out of the interchangeable use of the terms 'varna', 'jati' and 'caste'.

Chapter 3 is a comprehensive survey of the socio-political traditions which are an inseparable part of the study of Brahmanism.

Chapter 4 depicts the role of the Brahmans in the political sphere. The focus has been set on the 'guiding' character of this class i.e., the spiritual elite.

In chapter 5 analytical study of the role of intellectual class has been made. The object is to highlight the leadership of the intellectuals. An attempt has been made to compare the position of the Brahmans with the philosopher king of Plato – central focus being the Hindu and the Greek cultures.

1

Varna-Ashrama-Dharma

The socio-economic structure of ancient India was founded on the moral ideal of self-realization which inspired and moulded the concept of life in all spheres. The Hindu ideal of dharma is the basis of varna-system. According to the Bhagvadgita, varna is based on guna and karma. Lord Krishna says, that all varnas are oreated by me "chatur varnayan maya srishtam", "Ashrama dharma is a necessary corollary of varna".[1]

The varna-system was the key-note of the social set-up. According to this system society was divided into four varnas, viz., the Brahman, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra.[2] Manu categorically asserts that there is no fifth varna besides the above the above mentioned four varnas.[3] This four-fold classification of men agrees with the one given in the Purusasukta of the Rgveda.[4]

The varna-system has been differently understood and interpreted by indologists and political philosophers. The dictionary meaning of the word 'varna' is both colour and description, M.V. Patwardhan regards description as a better interpretation.

The word varna as description is used in the word varnamala which means collectively the alphabets of a language. Here, it implies the basic conception with which one has to start the description of a language. In the same manner, when the word varna is used in the context of society, it means the basic assumption with which one starts the description of a society. Society shall have to be divided into four parts, namely, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. Without this assumption, the social construction is impossible. Varna-system is a moral and logical explanation as to why a society must be divided into four parts if it has to harmoniously function towards a particular goal.

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[1] Gandhi, M.K., *Young India*, pp. 10, 20 and 27.

[2] Manu, I. 31.

[3] *Ibid*., 10.4; Yaj., I.10; Baud.

[4] RV, 90.12.

The term society as defined by the Oxford Dictionary is "an association of persons united by a common aim or interest or principle". Every known society must naturally divide itself into these four varnas, i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. There is no escape from this division. It is as if a law of nature. Varnas, therefore, are the natural and automatic four classes through which a society has to function.

In the Vedic and other scriptures several passages support the assumption that varna is a universal law of nature. In the Purushasukta, the division of the society into Brahman, Kshatriya or Rajyana, Vaisya and Sudra, is associated with the creation of the sun, the moon. The directions and the sky indicating that these divisions were automatic and beyond the control of human beings. In Manusmriti, the description of the divisions into Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra precedes the creation of Virat, i.e., the form of God from which the objects of the whole universe were created. It implies that this division is a universal law, applicable to all societies. The evolutionary development of the social phenomenon proceeds from the varna and cannot go against it.

The translation of the word 'varena', which is synonymous to the word 'varna' as tradition or custom conforms to the new interpretation of the word 'varna', and not with its old meaning as colour. The word 'varna' is also found in 'Avesta', a religious book of the Parsis. The Bhagvadgita also describes 'varna' as division of the society into four classes according to the qualities and actions created or destroyed by God only.

In the latter Vedic literature, and in all the Puranas and Mahabharata, and also other innumerable places, wherever the word varna is used in relation to the society, it invariably means Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. These four classes are described to be of divine origin.

The western scholars, however, attributed the origin of varna to the conflict between the white Aryan conquering race and the black Dravidian conquered and enslaved race. Zimmer's version of the word pancajana is based on the racial theory of white Aryans and black Dravidians. Zimmer's version of the word pancajana is based on the racial theory cf white Aryans and black Dravidians. The different meanings of the word pancajana may be divided into two parts: (i) traditional, as those of Aitareya Brahman, Yaska, Aupamanyava and Sayana, and (ii) as those of Roth, Geldner and Zimmer.

It has now been conclusively proved that the Aryans and Dravidians were not white and black races but are language groups. The language groups cannot be purely white or black but are generally a mixture of races of different colours and anthropological measurements.

The western interpretations are based on wrong assumptions and inference. Therefore, they cannot be relied upon. Sankara, one of the greatest exponents of Hindu philosophy, regards the interpretations of Aupamanyava and Sayana as traditional versions of the word pancajana. There is sufficient reason to accept the interpretation of the word pancajana as Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra and Nisada or Avarna. This view is upheld by Aupamanyava, Yaska, Sankara and Sayana and is backed by logical and rational reasoning.

These five races (Panca Kristayah) have descended from Manu.[5] This clearly shows that the divisions of the society into five classes or Jatis of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra, and Nisada or Avarna, was first expounded by Manu. It was he who divided the society, first, into five big groups or Jatis and then into innumerable necessary upjatis division of labour according to talent or sanskar was essential for the smooth and efficient working of the society.

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[5] AV, III. 24.3.

It is a part of new interpretation of the word varna that Manu divided the society, first, into Savarnas and Avarnas. The Savarna was later divided into Dvija and Sudra. The criteria for division was ability to recite the Vedas. Manu re-arranged the society according to the law of varna. Persons who were Mrdhravac and Anas but respected the Vedas, and performed religious rites and sacrifices were included in the Savarna group, while the Dasas and Dasyus who were Avrata, Asiva, Adeva, Akratu, etc., were put in the Avarna group together with the Nisadas.

Thus the Dasas and Dasyus were eliminated by Manu by including them in the Sudra and Avarna group. This is the reason as to why they do not appear in Brahman and later Vedic scriptures. The vanquishing of the Dravidians had nothing to do with it because it does not explain as to why did the group of Avarnas come into existence. Nor does it furnish the reason as to why should the Aryans allow the Brahmans to divide their group into three-graded class and reserve the superiority for Brahmans.

The Vedic period can be divided into two parts: pre-Manu and post-Manu. In the pre-Manu period the laissez faire principle was prevailing and anybody could take to any profession as well as study the Vedas. Allotment of duties to different groups according to division of labour was made by Manu. This helped the transformation by effecting an orderly arrangement of duties for different Jatis or castes and brought about a universal and efficient employment. Every member of the society, including the Avarnas, had a fixed vocation allotted to him. In order to maintain universal employment for an indefinite period, the division of labour was to be a permanent feature. It logically resulted in the transmission of caste into heredity factor only. There was no alternative or a remedy.

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It is obvious that Manu wanted to utilize to the fullest advantage of the society the principle of heredity as well as the environmental factor. It is also clear that he was aware of the merits as well as the limitations of these principles. It is believed that intelligence is dependent on heredity, while the cultural characteristics can be developed in the environmental conditions. The first division of the society into Dvijas and Sudras was done according to hereditary intellectual capacity. The further division into three groups viz., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya was done according to environmental conditions for their delimination and development.

This was the general plan based on the principle of varna through which Manu wanted to give people universal employment. When this plan was to be actually put into practice, the whole population had to be divided into two parts. Persons who were unwilling to cooperate in the experiment had to be separated from those ready to join. Cooperative individuals were inside the varna society while the recalcitrant section of the population was to stay outside the varna society. Since a part of the population could vitiate the experiment, it was desirable to separate them from the rest and prevent them from mixing with them. In order to sustain the arrangement, a social barrier was created between the two by treating the Avarnas as untouchables. But this social barrier, to begin with, did not prevent Avarnas from mixing with the general population.

While categorizing people, Manu said that they would be known by their respective occupations. In India, even to this day, the family has not yet disintegrated into its constituent members. But the division of masses into varnas and Avarnas is not the peculiarity of the Hindu society alone. Every social system has to be practically divided into these two parts. When a social unit is separated from the general population to carry out a particular purpose, it was to maintain its separate entity from the general population by creating a barrier of rules for admission to keep the rest of the population from mixing with it. It is a universal law and was not confined only to Hindu society.

Gandhi says, 'the law of varna and 'ashrama' is to be traced to our most ancient scriptures - the Vedas'.[6] He further says,'Varna means predetermination of choice of a man's profession. The law of varna is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood.... Varna is, therefore, the law of heredity, but it lays down principles and leaves you to find the application for yourself. The Gita does talk of guna and karma but guna and karma are inherited by birth. The law of varna is nothing, if not by birth.'[7]

In following the law of varna, therefore, one has to follow the hereditary and traditional calling of one's forefathers in so far as the traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. Gandhi adds, 'I believe that just as every one inherits a particular form so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors, and to make this admission is to conserve one's energies. That frank admission, if he will act up to it, would put a legitimate curb upon our material ambitions, and thereby our energy is set free for extending the field of spiritual research and spiritual evolution.'[8]

It is, therefore, not a human invention, but an immutable law of human nature - an unavoidable social tendency. 'Just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered, so did the law of varna. Varna is not caste; it is class. A man may call himself a Brahman, i.e., a teacher of religion, if he is one in fact; or a Kshatriya, i.e., a soldier, if he is one; or Vaishya, i.e., a merchant or a farmer if he is that; or a Shudra, i.e., an employee if he is one. These divisions are not castes but classes and have reference to calling.'[9]

Gandhi wrote : I believe that every man is born in the world with certain definite limitations which he cannot overcome. From a careful observation of those limitations the law of varna was deduced. It establishes certain spheres of action for certain people with certain tendencies. This avoided all unworthy competition. Whilst recognizing limitations, the law of varna admitted of no distinctions of high and low. On the one hand it guaranteed to each the fruits of his labours and on the other it prevented him from pressing upon his neighbour. This great law has been degraded and fallen into disrepute. It was believed that an ideal social order will only be evolved when the implications of this law are fully understood and given effect to.

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[6] *Harijan*, September 28, 1934.

[7] Gandhi, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 386.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 24 and 27.

The present caste system in India is the very antithesis of varna dharma. The discrimination of status based on birth, which is implied in the caste system cannot be deduced from the law of varna. Gandhi says, 'In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of advaita and my interpretation of advaita excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All ... have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves ... I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow being.'[10]

This also explains Gandhi's crusade against the practice of untouchability which is neither a part of varna nor of Hinduism. Varna dharma having become distorted gave rise to untouchability.[11] To the question whether there is any hierarchy implied in the idea of varna, Gandhi replied, 'No, not at all, although I do say Brahmanism is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service but not superior status. The moment superior status is arrogated, it becomes worthy of being trampled under foot.'[12]

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 385.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 476.

[12] *Ibid.*

The idea of duty is implicit in varna since it is referred to as dharma. 'Varna does not connote a set of rights or privileges; it prescribes duties or obligation only. And no one can divest us of our duty, unless we ourselves choose to shirk it.' In support of this, Gandhi quotes a verse from the Upanishads which means 'God pervades all animate and inanimated objects. Therefore, renounce all and dedicate it to God and then live.' 'The right of living', says Gandhi, 'is thus derived from renunciation.' It does not mean 'when all do their part of the work, I too will do it.' It says 'Don't bother about others, do your job first, and leave the rest to Him.'[13]

The idea of superiority or inferiority is wholly repugnant to it. The performance of one's hereditary function is done as a matter of duty, though it naturally carries with it the earning of one's livelihood. 'Thus, the function of a Brahman is to study and to teach the science of Brahman (or spiritual truth). He performs the function, as he cannot do otherwise, as it is the law of his being. That secures him his livelihood, but he will take it as a gift from God.'[14]

Thus the law of varna implies the adoption of hereditary profession, on the one hand, and the performance of that function in the spirit of duty on the other. That is to say, although the varna is determined by birth, it can only be retained by observing its obligations. A person born of Brahman parents will be called a Brahman, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a Brahman when he comes of age, he cannot be called a Brahman. He will have fallen from Brahmanhood. On the other hand, one who is not born a Brahman but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a Brahman will be regarded as a Brahman, though he will himself disclaim the label.[15]

Gandhi's adherence to Varnashrama is a part of his metaphysical beliefs. He writes, 'Varnashrama dharma defines man's mission on this earth. He is not born day after day to explore avenues for amassing riches and to explore different means of livelihood, on the contrary, man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his maker.'[16]

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[13] *Harijan*, March 6, 1937.

[14] *Ibid.*, September 28, 1934.

[15] *Ibid.*

Acharya Vinoba Bhave says that the concept of Varna Vyavastha has been the subject of diverse interpretations which consequently created a great deal of confusion.[17] The Acharya has summarized the essence of varna dharma as follows: (a) equal wage for all, (b) absence of competition, and (c) a system of education which takes the fullest advantage of the hereditary capacities of the people. The Acharya says, 'In our opinion, that is all that is needed in a non-violent social structure.'[18]

The exposition of the learned Acharya differs from that of Mashruwala. Mashruwala emphasizes that heredity has been considered the sole determinant of varna dharma of varna vyavastha.[19]

The Gandhian concept of varna dharma though opposed to untouchability, tends to create an atmosphere which may strengthen the rigidity of the caste system, since the people are likely to forget preconditions for the functioning of the varna dharma. When the general population divides itself into different functional groups to carry out social activities and permanently continue to perform the same, these groups ultimately assume the character of jatis. Jatis, like varnas, are divided into Dvijatis and Sudras. The distinguishing quality between the two is the same, i.e., the ability to recite the Vedas. Varnas, therefore, are the creations of the law of nature while jatis are intentionally created by human beings.

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[16] Quoted in G. Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, Ahmedabad, 1957, p. 99.

[17] K.G. Mashruwala, *Gandhi and Marx*, Ahemdabad, 1952, p. 23.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

[19] K.G. Mushruwala, *Gandhi Vichar Dohan.*

In chapter ten, Manu actually divides the general population of the Indian continent for giving them universal employment. It is here, first, that the compartment of Avarnas comes into existence and the vocations and the rules for accommodating them in the social structure are defined. While discussing about the origin of the mixed castes (varna-samkara), Manu seems to have clarified the distinction between varna (caste) and jati. He lays down that sons begotten by twiceborn men on wives of the next lower castes, are similar (to their fathers) but blamed on account of the fault (inherent) in their mothers.

This law is applicable to children of a wife from varna, only one degree lower than that of her husband. The real mixture of varnas (varnasamkara) therefore arises with offsprings born of a woman two or three degrees lower. Thus the son born of a Brahman father and a Vaisya mother would be called an Ambastha; that born of a Brahman father and a Sudra mother would be called Nisada, and so on.

The mixture of varnas takes place in other ways also. For example, of a Kshatriya father and a Brahman mother. Issues belonging to the Sudra mother, spring issues belonging to the Sudra caste; children born of a Vaisya father and Kshatriya mother or a Brahman mother, belong to Magadha and Videha castes respectively; and so on. The intermarriages between these new castes give rise to newer and newer castes, so that the process goes on multiplying. Thus, the Suta, the Magadha, and the Vaideha are names according to their jati (jatitah).

The term varna-samkara (mixture of varnas) is also used by Manu. Though he refers to four varnas only, yet he mentions about fifty-seven jatis, as a result of varnasamkara. Senart has shown that the word Arya varna in the Rgvedic literature, is used to distinguish Aryans from the Dasa varna, the enemies of the Aryans. But later on, the word varna was applied to more numerous categories. It denoted only the four castes (varnas). The castes which did not correspond with the four-fold divisions into varnas, were designated by the term jati. This interpretation, given by Senart, agrees with that of Manu.

It was Manu who created the different jatis and who gave them different and appropriate vocations. And as he wanted this division of labour to continue indefinitely, he made the jatis hereditary. He also defined the Asrma duties for the different varnas. Thus there seems to have existed two groups in the society, one of Aryans and the other of Sudras. Aryans were also known as Dvijas because they had two births : one from the womb of the mother and the other from the guru, after the investiture ceremony.

Origin and Evolution of Brahmans

An enquiry into the origin and evolution of Brahmans reveals that they occupied the most prominent position in the varna system of ancient India. Their spiritual and intellectual authority was unquestioned. Various primary sources like the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahman Smritis, Dharma Sastras etc., regarding the authenticated status of Brahmans from 4 century B.C. to 4 century A.D., reveal that they had attained the highest social position. A study of classical sanskrit, pali sources, archaeological, etymological and anthropological sources have corroborated the fact of the supremacy of Brahmans in the varna hierarchy.

The Brahman in the varnashrama scheme is to lead the life of renunciation, living on barest subsistence allowance and occupy the most honoured position in the social hierarchy. The general tendency of men of all classes is to strive for the summit due to their impression that the position at the top is one of pleasure, profit and power. To obtain these, everyone wishes to climb the social ladder. But in the Hindu scheme, life becomes more difficult as we rise higher. A Brahman should do nothing for the sake of enjoyment. If an individual attains higher level of social responsibility and the diminution of personal enjoyments, he rises in the social ladder. He will find real satisfaction with his own place and work in the society. Those who seek the higher place will lead a life of simplicity and self-denial.[20]

A study of the ancient Indian society proves that Brahmans held a prominent place in almost all the important domains of life. In the field of culture, our most precious heritage is what the Brahmans made it. In political matters, nothing was possible without the advice of the counsellors who used to be largely Brahmans.

The importance of the Brahman class is well acknowledged by Manu. The king of Manu's ideal state follows the advice of Brahman and it is expected that he shall never go against it. Though Manu gives high ranking to the Brahman class by stating that "It is created from the mouth of the Lord", he considers this class as one of the four varnas.

Status and Duties of Brahmans

A large portion of Manusmriti is devoted to exhortations to Brahmans in their day to day conduct for whole of life, from cradle to the grave. The picture represented the Brahman varna at the top of the social system by virtue of its origin.[21] Defining a true Brahman, Manu says that he reaches the highest goal by muttering prayers only; whether he performs other rites or neglects them, he who befriends all creatures is a true Brahman.[22] The word Maitrah used in this context is differently explained by the commentators. He is by right the lord of all creation as he sprang from Brahma's mouth and as he possessed the Veda.[23] He is described as the most excellent of all mankind.[24] His very birth was meant for the protection of the treasure of the law.[25] Thus their pre-eminence was established not only over the varnas but over all the created beings. The great grammarian Patanjali also speaks about the superiority of the Brahmans when he says that in a compound, words like Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra take the first, second, third and fourth position according to their status in the social set-up.

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[20] S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, London, 1926, p. 135.

[21] Manu, I. 93.

[22] *Ibid.*, II. 87.

[23] *Ibid.*, I.93, 130.

Brahmans, through whose mouths God continuously consume sacrificial viands and manes, the offerings to the dead, were considered unsurpassable by the created beings.[26] A Brahman was considered as the very incarnation of dharma on earth.[27] He eats but his own food; wears but his own apparel; bestows but his own in alms. Other mortals subsist only, thanks to the benevolence of the Brahmans.[28]

Analyzing the causes of the superiority of the Brahman varna, Motwani observes, that it was due to the theory of their divine origin.[29] His intellectual superiority could have also added to his preeminence. Finally, virtuous conduct combined with the above mentioned qualities, must have strengthened his claims. A Brahman who departed from the rule did not reap the fruit of Veda, but one who duly followed it would obtain the full reward.[30] Self-control was also held to be the most important quality of a Brahman. 'A Brahman who completely governs himself, though knows only Savitri, is better than the one who knows the three Vedas (but) does not control himself, eats all (sorts of) food and sells all (sorts of goods).'[31]

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[24] *Ibid.*, I.96.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.*, I.95.
[27] *Ibid.*, I.98.
[28] *Ibid.*, I.101.
[29] K. Motwani, *Manu Dharma Sastra*, Madras, 1937, p. 93.
[30] Manu, I.109.
[31] *Ibid.*, II.8.

In the introduction to the Mahabhasya, Patanjali stresses the need of a good knowledge of grammar for the sistas as it brings enlightenment, and is the best preservative of their moral and cultural integrity.[32] Penance, learning and birth were the three essential qualities of a Brahman, lack of which relegated him to the category of a jati Brahman (Brahman by birth).[33] This was indicative of the superiority of a learned and spiritually advanced Brahman over an ordinary Brahman. The viewpoint of Patanjali is fully substantiated by Manu.

The Milindapanha, like other Buddhist texts, declares, a Brahman is one who is endowed with high, good, healthy and divine ideas; who knows the state of affairs of his previous birth; who has dispelled all his doubts and illusions, who has vanquished greed; who has freed himself from the circle of birth and death and will not be reborn; who has become pure after destroying evil notions and attachment once and for all and who remains content within himself without depending upon others; who studies himself and teaches others; who accepts alms; who restrains his senses; who is wedded to his duty; and who maintains the high ideals of family.

This model of a Brahman leans heavily on the virtuous conduct of a person rather than his birth. The Vajra-Suci Upanisad repudiates the idea that a person's varna is determined by his birth and establishes that a person is Brahman neither by his birth nor by knowledge but by his conduct.[34]

Sometimes colour could also be the determining factor of a person's varna. Patanjali considers a person to be a Brahman if he is of white complexion and the rest as non-Brahmans.[35] The word used in this context is Sukla bhasvara which denotes either 'white brilliant' or 'clean brilliant'. But there are many examples where

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[32] B.N. Puri, *India in the Time of Patanjali*, Bombay, 1957, p. 89.

[33] Patanjali, Mahabhasya. 2.2.2.1 cf. Govind Prasad Upadhyay, *Brahmans in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1979.

[34] Vajrasuci Upanisad, I.4, 9. cf. Upadhyay, *op. cit.*

[35] L. Joshi, *Rajwade Lekha Samgraha*, New Delhi, 1958, pp. 63-64.

Brahmans are described as black-complexioned or red-complexioned. Here, we may take the example of Yama and Agni who are described as having syama complexion and red complexion respectively. If this be correct, then only the second interpretation of the term will make sense. Manu's colour distinction among castes can also be understood in this very spirit.

Manu prescribes teaching, studying, sacrificing for himself, sacrificing for others, making gifts and receiving them as the lawful acts for a Brahman. But in the very next injunction, he says that among the six acts, three are his means of subsistence - sacrificing for others, teaching and accepting gifts from pure men.[36] The remaining three can be described as his chief duties. These duties made the life of a Brahman full of penance and discipline. The study of the Vedas was his chief duty and all others were secondary.[37] Therefore he should study them with zeal and efforts. He should avoid all wealth which impedes the study of the Vedas because the Veda study secures the realization of his aims.[38]

A Brahman was required to perform sacrifices for his welfare. He who untiringly performs daily rites prescribed for him in the Veda, according to his ability, attains the highest state.[39] He should always perform the five great sacrifices (Panca-Mahayajnas) if he is able to perform them. These sacrifices are rsiyajna, deva-yajna, bhuta-yajna, nr-yajna and pitr-yajna. Some men who know the ordinances for sacrificial rites, always offer these great sacrifices in their organs of sensation without any external efforts. Knowing that the performance of the sacrifice in their speech and their breath yield imperishable rewards, some always offer their breath in their speech. These rites are to be performed through knowledge.[40]

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[36] Manu, X.75.
[37] *Ibid.*, IV.147.
[38] *Ibid.*, IV.17.
[39] *Ibid.*, IV.14.
[40] *Ibid.*, IV.21-24.

Making of gift is the third duty of a Brahman. By this act, he develops selflessness and detachment towards things. He should enjoy his property and happiness with others. Hoarding is the cause of many social evils. Manu seems to be against concentration of wealth. A Brahman householder must give as much food as he is able to spare to those who do not cook for themselves and to all beings one must distribute food without detriment to one's own interest.[41]

At one place, Manu counts the Brahman donor of a thousand cows among those who sanctify a gathering. It was also a duty of the Brahman to compassionately support an indigent Kshatriya or Vaisya, by putting them on work in keeping with their respective varna.[42] The Brahmans along with other well off persons were expected to give alms. Later, we have the Sukla Brahmans and from none else.

The rise and spread of Buddhism gave a jolt to Brahmanism. Pusyamitra tried to check this onslaught of Buddhism over Brahmanism and restore it to its previous position. The Manusmriti also consolidates the tenets of Brahmanism. So it is logical to proclaim the superiority of Brahmans over other varnas. Jayaswal says that the Manavasastra suffers from its political, social and sacerdotal prejudices. Probably it became the approved code of the Sunga regime.[43]

Kshatriyas

The Kshatriya varna was accorded the second place in the social set-up. Kings and warriors were usually recruited from this varna. The king surpassed all others in lustre, power and valour, because he was supposed to be fashioned with the particles of gods.[44] He should not be considered as an ordinary mortal but a great deity in human form.[45]

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[41] *Ibid.*, IV.32.

[42] *Ibid.*, VIII.411.

[43] K.P. Jayaswal, *Manu and Yajnavalkya*, Calcutta, 1930, p. 15.

[44] Manu, VII. 4-5.

[45] *Ibid.*, 7-8.

There existed a close relationship between Brahmans and Kshatriyas. The Kshatriyas sprang from the Brahmans as fire from water and iron from stone. According to Raghavananda, a commentator of Manusmriti, the above statement is based on a passage of Chandogya Upanisad where it is declared that in the beginning there was only one varna and that was Brahman varna. But the Brahmans were unable to perform all works. So a need was felt to distribute work among themselves. Those who were engaged in study and teaching of the Veda were called Brahman, those who took upon themselves the duty of protection, were called Kshatriyas and similarly those engaged in agriculture and service of other varnas were called Vaisyas and Sudras respectively.[46]

The glory and success resulting from the cooperation between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas is frequently emphasized. These two (the Srotrya and the king) are the upholders of the sacred law among men.[47] This close relationship of these two is said to be the most desirable and is conducive to the eminence and success of both. So, Manu lays down that Kshatriyas prosper not without Brahmans, and Brahmans prosper not without Kshatriyas. Brahmans and Kshatriyas, if closely united, prosper in this world and also in the next one.[48]

Vaisyas

The third varna was the Vaisyas. Bestowing of gifts, offering of sacrifices and the study of the Vedas, were the three main duties of a Vaisya.[49] The Brahman and the Kshatriya were superior to him because he was the third in the order of enumeration.[50] He should zealously give food to all created beings.[51]

[46] *Ibid.*, IX. 321.
[47] *Ibid.*, III. 22.
[48] *Ibid.*, Gaut. XI. 14; Vas. XIX. 4.
[49] *Manu*, I. 89.
[50] *Ibid.*, 31.
[51] *Ibid.*, IX. 333.

Sudras

The fourth varna was meant to serve the other three higher varnas. Accordingly, the lowest place in the social scale went to the Sudras. Then he grieved and from his grief (socana) the word Sudra took its form. But this derivation is not convincing.[52] Vidhusekhar Sastri derives this word from the Sanskrit word ksudra.[53] Ethnological approach, if nothing else, has at least established the fact that there is no racial basis for the difference among castes.[54]

By the time of Manu, the Sakas had come to be characterized as Mlecchas and Sudras.[55] Manu at one place distinguishes between a free Sudra and a slave Sudra who could be bought and sold.[56] Manu, like the Rgveda and Bhagavadgita, places the Sudras alongwith the Dvijas in the same stock and clearly distinguishes them from the untouchables who may or may not have belonged to the original complexion of the four varnas.

To serve Brahmans who are well-read in the Vedas, was the highest duty of a Sudra. A Sudra who was pure, served his superiors with devotion, was gentle in speech and free from pride and sought refuge from Brahmans, attained (in his next life) a higher varna.

Besides an illustration of rules and regulations for the four varnas, the tenth chapter of Manusmriti also talks of the Avarnas. This supports the contention that the five classes of the Hindu society i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra and Avarna were the creation of Manu.

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[52] Chitra Tiwari, *Sudras in Manu*, p. 14.

[53] Indian Antiquary, Vol. IX, 1922-Sudra.

[54] Chitra Tiwari, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13.

[55] Manu, X. 43-45.

A clearcut and irrefutable proof that Hindu society was divided into five classes and not four, is the composition of the existing Hindu society which has five big classes or castes i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, Sudra and Untouchables or Avarnas. This division of the society into five classes or castes can be traced to the Smriti period. The earliest being the Manusmriti which is composed during 200 B.C. to 200 A.D.

It is, now, clear that in the beginning, castes evolved naturally as a functional outfit in the interest of the welfare of society as a whole. An ideal society was conceived to be an organic body. Just as a body consists of four important limbs- mouth, arm, stomach and feet, similarly the society had also four constituents, i.e., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. We cannot belittle the importance either of the hand or that of the feet. Each limb has to perform a definite function in the body. If any one of the limbs suffers, the other parts are bound to be affected. Thus, a co-ordination among the four is absolutely essential. The Brahmans and the Kshatriyas, had to perform jobs of teaching and protection, respectively for the benefit of the society. Hence, there is no question of their being related to higher or lower strata. The varna-division, as originally conceived, was horizontal and not vertical as it become later. The Brahmans later came to be considered as superior with some sort of a pious quality and the Sudra as the lowest in the hierarchy.

2

Genesis of the Concept

The concept of Brahmanism is marked by varying shades of connotations. The term Brahma which developed into Brahman, originated in the Vedas and culminated in the Upanisads and the Vedantic literature, meaning absolute, the great and the singular essence of the diverse pluralistic becoming.[1] But in the Vedas, the term 'Brahma' which is the source of the concept of Brahman stood for the notion of a magical force[2] drawn from the orderly co-operation of the hymns, the chants and sacrificial gifts.

The idea of Brahma, the holy or mysterious power, emerged from the speculation about an all-pervasive force governing the whole universe. The basis of Brahma in the notion of power or force or lustre or vigour has been significantly highlighted by the Upanishadic seers as the absolute was conceived in terms of its identity with truth, genesis and bliss.

The word Brahman generally denotes a person born in Brahman family. However, no such meaning is indicated in the hymns of the Rgveda, where it occurs but rarely.[3] Though some Upanisadas determine the varna of a person from his birth in a particular family, they do not ignore his meritorious qualities.

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[1] RV, VIII. 3.

[2] *Ibid.*, II. 24.3. Oldenberg, Weltanschauug der Brahmanic text, p. 49 denied that in the Veda there exists either the idea or the word for a supernatural power encompassing the world, of. Govind Prasad Upadhyay, *Brahmanas in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1979.

[3] A.A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 136. "The word Brahman... occurring only eight times while Brahman which simply means sage or officiating priest is found forty six times". But in the Veda, Brahman is not really an officiating priest. He is silently watching the performance of others, intervening only, thanks to his science, to repair the faults.

According to the Brahadaranyaka Upanisad, a true Brahman is one who is devoted to Brahma.[4] The story of Satyakama Jabala, as narrated in the Chhandogya Upanisad, shows that at times the individual merit of a person could override the barrier of birth.[5]

The remark of the sage Gautama is worth noticing here: "None but a (true) Brahman would thus speak out"[6] Also those with good conduct will be reborn in good families, i.e., in the family of a Brahman. But those of evil conduct will be born as dogs and pigs of chandalas.[7]

The Sutras also stress the cultivation of similar virtues. The Vasistha Dharma Sutra accepts a person as a Brahman if he possesses such virtues as yoga, penance, self-restraint, charity, knowledge, purity, education, science and belief in gods. Again, one who is neither good nor bad; neither well-heard nor not-heard; neither knowing any good or a bad event is called a true Brahman.

Long enmity, jealousy, falsehood, abusing a Brahman, backbiting and cruelty are described as the qualities that degrade a Brahman to the status of a Sudra. The weal of a Brahman is said to be his good actions performed at a proper time and place and also purity. Another source declares a Brahman to be Agni and quotes in support the Sruti that Agni is Brahman. For Vasistha, Brahmans acquiring learning through unbroken tradition and believing in the authority of the Sruti, are the Sistha Brahmans.

The term Maha-Brahma is also found in the Pali text and denotes an eminent Brahman who has acquired self-realization. The Bodhisattva Narada is referred to as a Maha-Brahma. The Matanga Jataka clearly refers to the superior position of such a Brahman. According to the Buddha, a true Brahman has both good conduct and knowledge. Panini also "refers to the Bhava

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[4] Br. Up. III. 5.1, 8.10.

[5] Ch. Up. IV. 4.1.

[6] *Ibid.*, 4.5

[7] *Ibid.*,V. 10.7.

(nature) and Karma (conduct) which should characterise a Brahman.[8]

Manu[9] places the Brahman caste at the top of the social system by virtue of its origin.[10] He states that 'As the Brahman sprang from Brahma's mouth, as he was first born, and as he possesses the Veda, he is by right the lord of this whole creation.'[11] Again, the Brahmans are said to be the most excellent of the intelligent mankind and men.[12] "A Brahman, coming into existence, is born as the highest on earth, the lord of all created beings, for the protection of the treasure of the law."[13]

Obviously, all the Brahmans did not conform to this high level of moral conduct. The Buddhist works show that like others there were good, bad, learned, foolish and greedy persons among Brahmans. The Anguttara Nikaya classifies the Brahmans under five heads, i.e., Brahmasamo, Devasamo, Mariyada, Sambhinna Mariyada and Candala Brahmans. The Brahmasamo were those who were of pure descent, properly educated, observing chastity, studied the Vedas and other works, earned their livelihood by alms, and renounced the world in the last days of their lives.

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[8] Panini, V.1.124, of V.S. Agarwala, *India as Known to Panini*, University of Lucknow, 1953, pp. 75-77.

[9] According to Schlegel, the Manusmriti is prior to 1000 B.C. Albrecht Weber considers it post-Mahabharatan. According to Burnell it is a work of the Manava school, a section of the Maitrayani Sakha of the Krishna Yajurveda. We have references about Manu in the RV, VIII. 27; II. 33.13; I. 124.2. Ketkar's idea that Manu is at least as old as the third century A.D. as stated in his *History of Caste in India*, has been criticized by Hopkins. According to Max Muller, the Manusmriti is posterior to the fourth century A.D. but George Buhler after a careful study of all available sources opines that this work as extant existed in the second century A.D. Julius Jolly also holds that the Manusmriti cannot belong to the period beyond the second or third century A.D. The name of Manu appears many times in the Mahabharata.

[10] Manu, I. 93.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*, 96.

[13] *Ibid.*, 98.

The second type differed from the first insofar as it took to worldly life after completing the period of Brahmacharya. The third type of Brahmans carried out the customs of their own caste while living as householders throughout their caste after having transgressed the relevant rules. The main aim of their married life was to have progeny. The last type did not practise their duties and were engaged in functions of Chandalas, such as, agriculture, trade, cattle-breeding, fighting as soldiers, and government service, etc. Thus, all the sources, the Brahmanical, the Buddhist and the Jains, lay stress on the supremacy of the moral qualities in the make up of a Brahman.

The varn-asrama-dharma, which in the pre-Mauryan times had become the foundation of social structure, is expounded by Kautilya in terms similar to those of the early law books.[14] In social set-up Brahmans were given the high place of honour as (if they were) gods on earth. Kautilya regards birth alone as the criterion for Brahmanhood. A Brahman is one who is born in a Brahman family, of Brahman parents. Stressing the necessity of pure descent and preventing varna-samkara, Kautilya expects the king to look after these matters with vigilant eye.

The concessions given to the Brahman by Kautilya shows that his state policy was founded on considerations of preservation of the time-tested principles of dharma, the injunctions which override the privileges of the Brahman certainly indicate his practical outlook. In his own case, royal power was subordinate to priestly power. Kautilya wanted to lay down expediency as the basis of the state policies. But he did not succeed in his aim most probably because he lived in a society influenced by Brahmanical tradition.

It is within the above conceptual framework that the word Brahman is meant to denote a person born of Brahman parents. The mainstream of Indian thought through the ages, in its insistence, follows from the Upanisads. Although a few streams of materialistic and vitalistic thought also prevailed. But the quest of the infinite and cosmic spirit was the dominant concern of the Hindu mind. The application of the abstract and rational intellect to the building up of systematic theories about the state and the society was subordinated to the spiritual approach.

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[14] V.P.Verma, *The Hindu Political Thought.*

Predominantly the word Brahman meant a sage or an officiating priest. But in the Vedas, he points out, that the Brahman like a watchdog is vigilant about the functioning of the other bodies and intervening only to repair the faults.[15] Charles Drekmeier observes that there is no evidence that the Brahmans were a caste or a class depending on birth. He establishes that knowledge and conduct rather than birth had been the determinants of Brahmanism.[16]

Thus the word Brahman denotes both the prayers addressed to different gods and the sage, the poet, the officiating or special priest. It would mean that a person, possessed of Brahman (Prayer), was called Brahman. With the rise of the cult of sacrifice, he was entrusted with the work of the officiating priest. Thus according to the Rgveda, Brahmanhood was determined by function and not by birth.

The word Brahman, according to the renowned lexicographers, Bohtlingk and Roth, is derived from the root 'brh' (Barh) and is taken to mean the godward striving devotion, which appears as an exuberance of spirit and particularly the pious expression of it in the service of the divine.[17] Geldner views it as the mysterious power inspiring the poet and the seer.[18]

To Hagu[19] it signifies growth or the means of securing growth, i.e., worship and prayer. He connects the word Brahma with Baresma of the Zend-Avesta. Other scholars like Osthoff[20],

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[15] A.A.Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, Delhi, 1962, p. 136.

[16] Charles Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Early India*, California, 1962, p. 80.

[17] R.S. Sharma, *Brahmins Through Ages*, Delhi, 1977.

[18] F.Geldner, *Vedische Studien*, Stuttgart, 1887 cf. Sharma, *op.cit.*

[19] *Aitareya Brahmana of the Rgveda*, I, Introduction, p.4

[20] Vide Winternitz, HIL, I, p. 247.

Oldenberg[21] and Hillebrandt[22] have compared Brahman with Bricht and have generally interpreted it as magic. For Winternitz this word in the Veda stood for a formula and the verses implied having sacred magical power. Haug, on the other hand, believes that in the Rgveda the term Krtabrahman signifies a mysterious power which could be invited by various ceremonies. But it seems that the significance of the magical power found in the word is much more predominant in the Athraveda than in the Rgveda wherein the word very often signifies a simple prayer.[23]

The connotation of magical power in the word Brahman seems to have developed on account of magical acts.[24] The priest as the performer of such acts had mastery over efficacious words and his speech was to be sharpened by the power of Brahman.[25] By means of invisible potency of Brahman, the priest could cure diseases.[26] Even in the later period, the Atharvan priest was known to have been possessed of such miraculous powers that Kautilya[27] recommended the priest's services to the king because the former could eradicate calamities both divine and human by the device laid down in the Atharvan rites. Manu held that Atharvan text was the greatest power of the priest.[28]

Apart from the ritualistic and magical interpretations, the concept of the term Brahman underwent[29] a great change corresponding to the change in the cultural life of the Vedic people. The philosophical significance of the term seems closely connected with the symbolical interpretations of sacrifices in the text. When the sacrifice was interpreted as universal principle, the Brahma became its essence. There developed the theory of an all-pervading God, the supreme cosmic energy and this absolute Brahma could be appropriated by mental sacrifice, meditation, and penance. Thus the term in its philosophic form also came to denote[30] the supreme spirit, the absolute.

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Belvalkar and Ranade, *History of Indian Philosophy*, II, pp. 10-14; Brahman, Baresman-Brich-Bharaj, Fourth Oriental Conference Proceedings, II, p.8.

[24] AV, XIX. 9.3; see also XIX. 9.4-5.

[25] *Ibid.*, XIX. 9.3-5.

[26] *Ibid.*, I. 10.1-4.

[27] KA, I.9.15.

[28] Manu, XI. 33.

[29] Padma Mishra, Priest and Seers in the Vedas with special reference to the Evolution of Brahman Class (Ph.D. Thesis, 1965, London University), p. 251.

This connotation gave a new dimension to the term and rendered it beyond the limitations of sacerdotalism and magical power. A passage in the Taittiriya Samhita points out this change stating that the hymns of the texts had a limited context but the Brahman was limitless. This etymological change in the Upanisadas brought about a corresponding evolution in the attributes of a Brahman.

The Brahman consequently is not merely a singer of hymns nor a priest discharging ritualistic functions but a person who had the knowledge of Brahma or the doctrine of the Supreme Soul.[31] In fact, a number of Brahmans who were proficient in such doctrines were described as Brahmavadins.[32] The knowledge of the absolute and the realization of the same by self-abnegation and ethical life accepted as the essential qualities of a Brahman, must have been advantageous to a Brahman whereby he could retain his varna by birth even though he might not have followed the priestly profession.

Other Connotations

Historically speaking, it is believed that the early Brahmans had come from outside India and belonged to Indo-European stock. According to Max Weber, the Brahmans were magicians. This statement presupposes the non-Aryan origin of the institution of priesthood. But this statement is only partially true because in the earlier part of the Rgveda we do not find sorcery in a very developed form, though the priest did have some knowledge of the spells. Panini, the great grammarian of 5th century B.C. explained that Brahman was one who was well-versed in Vedas. In Vedic literature, the Brahman appears in different capacities performing varied functions of Vipra. rsi, poet, etc. In the socio-religious life of the Vedic people, his sphere of activities and obligations took a comprehensive character.

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[30] V. Fausboll, *Indian Mythology*, London, 1902, p.57.

[31] Br. Up. III. 5.1.

[32] Ved.Ind., II.p. 79; Up., II. 6.1.3; Pr. Up., 1-4; Br. Up., III. 7.4.

The Vipra appears as an inspired singer in Vedic literature[33] but later the term signifies a learned Brahman and in the Epics it comes to mean no more than a Brahman.[34] The word is used as a synonym for a learned Brahman in the Satapatha Brahman.[35] The rsis were the seers who composed fresh hymns in their divinely charged moods. In the later Vedic literature, they are depicted and cited as poets 'par excellence' who composed the Vedic hymns.[36] It is to be noted that the word Brahman also appears to signify a thinker and a poet.[37] As Brahman in neuter form also connotes hymn,[38] prayer and magic.[39] Its masculine form Brahma by implication "denotes the person who composes or repeats a hymn or prayer.[40]

Geldner opines that "it is not till the time of Brahmans that the composition of hymns appears to have fallen into disuse.[41] But long before the time of Dharmasutras, new additions to the Vedic hymns had ceased. However, in Rgveda itself, we find the Brahmans being regarded as rsis. The case of Vasistha is an obvious one for he appears at once as Purohita of Sudas and as a Brahman in the sacrifice of Sunahsepa.[42] But he, along with six other rsis, forms the list of the traditional seven rsis. The rest also, i.e., Gautama, Bharadvaja, Visvamitra, Jamadagni, Ksyapa and Atri[43] who were described as Brahman and Purohita, were known at the same time, as rsis. The kings who composed hymns were also regarded as Rajarsis or Rajanyarsis,[44] i.e., rsis.

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[33] RV, I. 129.2.

[34] Ved. Ind. II. p. 302.

[35] SBr., III. 5.3.12.

[36] *Ibid.*, I. 7.44; 115.1.4.

[37] RV, I. 80.1; I. 164.34; X. 107.6.

[38] Oldenberg, *Zurreligion and Mythologie des Veda*, Nach, Gott., 1915, p. 195 of. Upadhyay, *op. cit*.

[39] Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda*, p. 65 cf. Upadhyay, *op. cit*.

[40] Fausboll, *op. cit*., p. 69.

[41] Geldner, *Vedische Studien*, 2, 151 cf. Sharma, *op. cit*.

But the formation of the Gotra lineage of the later Brahmans after the Vedic rsis, firmly establishes the fact that the later Brahmans became the representatives of the rsis of bygone days. In course of time, "the rsis became the representatives of sacred past and were regarded as holy sages whose deeds were believed to be the deeds of gods or Asuras".[45] They were the most exalted of the Vipras and Brahmans. Their skill was regarded as heaven-sent. The Brahmans descended from them and represent all the deities.[46]

The inheritance of the rsi tradition also seems to be one of the factors which made the Brahmans the intellectual leaders of society. The authors of the Vedic Index hold the view that the Brahman denotes the priestly class as opposed to the warrior class and the people, i.e., Kastra and Vis.[47] The passages to this effect are found in the Rgveda, the Atharvaveda, and the Samhitas. The word Brahman denotes a special class of priests distinguished from other functionaries at sacrifices like hotr, potr, rtvija, nestr, agnidh, prasastra, and adhvarya.[48] Almost all the verbs associated with the word Brahman unmistakably indicate different priestly activities.[49] The Brahmans were intimately connected with priestly functions. Geldner[50] opines that the Purohita from the beginning acted as the Brahman priest in the sacrificial ritual and used to be the general superintendent of the sacrifice.

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[42] RV, VII. 33.11.

[43] *Ibid.*, IV. 42.8; X. 109.4; 130.7; Av,. XI. 1.24; XII. 1.39.

[44] J.T. Wheeler, *Ancient and Hindu India, The Brahmanic Period*, Calcutta, 1961, pp. 22-23.

[45] Ved. Ind:, I. pp. 116-17.

[46] SBr., XII. 4.4.6.

[47] Ved. Ind. II.p. 77.

[48] RV, II. 1.2; X. 91.10; X. 52.2.

[49] ERE, II, p. 797.

Oldenberg[51] holds the view that the Purohita has been hotr priest, the singer par excellence. He connects the functions of the Purohita with magical aspects. He further argues, when priestly activity ceased to be the centre in the song, the Purohita with his skill in magic became Brahman. He also regarded the magical power strong enough to undo the errors of sacrifices.[52] It is found that the Brahman priest established his link with royalty and became the royal chaplain.[53]

Thus, the Brahman, a special class of priests, appears in different capacities and is equated with rsi, sage, poet, singer, and the leader of worship. He is presented as a genius who excels in divine knowledge and virtue.[54] He is made exceedingly mighty by divine favour and receives the special gift of godly inspiration. His utterances are welcomed by the gods and men alike.[55]

What emerges out of these functions of Brahmans are the different sets of roles they had played in the socio-religious activities in the Vedic and later Vedic period. But as the Vedic culture was dominated by the ritualistic cult of fire worship, the Brahmans monopolised the priestly functions.

In the Rgvedic age, the functions of the king and that of the priest were combined in a single person.[56] Later, when the king was over-burdened with administrative chores and the sacrificial rituals had become complex, the need for a person, able to devote his full time to the sacrificial rituals, was increasingly felt. In this way, priesthood was separated from kingship.

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[50] Vide Ved. Ind., II. p. 77.

[51] Oldenberg, *Religion des Veda*, pp. 380-81 cf. Upadhyay, *op. cit.*

[52] ABr., VII. 26.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] RV, X. 107.6.

[55] RV, X. 125.6.

[56] N.N. Law, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Polity*, Calcutta, 1960, p. 42. Max Weber, *Religion of India*, pp. 29-31. See also R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 1959, p. 70. "Generally in primitive societies no distinction can be made between the war-chief and the priest in many cases the same person combining both offices. The evidence in case of the

With the passage of time and due to the growth of administrative works, the king gradually became far removed from the science of rituals and this knowledge was cherished by the priests. According to Max Weber, it was perhaps the right time when the magician had invaded the circles of ancient priestly nobles and finally taken over their legacy.[57]

The institution of priesthood goes back to Indo-European times[58] as its existence can be traced in countries like Iran, Greece and Germany, where Indo-European people settled after migration. But according to Pargiter[59] and Kosambi,[60] the priests (of course, a large number of them) were recruited from the conquered aborigins by the Aryan invaders.

Pargiter says that Brahmanism was originally, not Aila or Aryan institution. The earliest Brahmans were connected with non-Aryan people, and were established among them when Ailas entered.[61] He further establishes a connection between the demons and the Brahmans on the basis of certain stories of the Mahabharata. "The ideas that Brahmans were priests to demons, that the demons themselves were priests, and the chief of the

Ancient India is not strong but not altogether wanting". Thus there is "the case of Visvamitra, a rajanya of Bharata and Kausika families (RV, III. 53.9-12) who acted as the priest of the king Sudas and hota priest at the sacrifice of Harischandra. Similarly Devapi, the priest of king Santanu, is represented by Yaska as the elder brother of Santanu. All this might suggest that at one stage in Vedic India also the functions of the chief and the priest were exercised by the same person".

[57] Max Weber, *Religion of India*, pp. 29-31.

[58] Rapson, *The Cambridge History of India,* Delhi, 1955, pp. 3-12.

[59] Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, London, 1922. p. 306.

[60] D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956, pp. 97-8.

[61] Pargiter, *op. cit.* pp. 306-7.

gods incurred the most heinous sin by killing demons, were so grotesque, if not blasphemous to orthodox Brahmanism, that they could never have been imagined in latter times, and are not to be found in Brahmanical literature".[62] Indra is often referred to in the hymns and in the Epic tradition as the slayer of Vrtra who was a Brahman.[63]

An examination of both the viewpoints shows that though the Brahman as such was an Indo-European institution, the priestly class of the Aryan conquerers might have been largely recruited from among the conquered. The honoured position which the priests got in the new-Aryan society was perhaps due to their occult faculties and powers.[64]

Hence "it appears that the original Brahmans were not so much priests as 'adepts' in matters supernatural, 'masters' of magic-religious force, wizards, medicinemen".[65] In this connection, Max Weber says, "Originally, the Brahmins were magicians who developed into a hierocratic caste of cultured men.[66] McDonell is of the view that, "long before the Rgveda, the magician had turned into a priest".[67]

He further adds that in the earliest period, the sacrificial priest was a magician as well. And that it cannot be supposed that even the most advanced minds among the priests regarded prayers and sacrifices as the only means of securing welfare while rejecting magic as an effective and reprehensible superstition. But these views are untenable because the Rgvedic sacrifice was not magical in character.

Deshmukh says,"Since magic never prevailed among the Indo-Europeans, at any rate, before the rise of religion in the form of belief in a worship of heavenly gods, there could not exist a separate class of hereditary magicians." The study of the Rgveda reveals that the sages might have possessed the knowledge of the sorcery but this was not the most important part of their knowledge. The full development of sorcery can be seen in the hymns of Atharvaveda where it was considered as the legitimate weapons of a Brahman to guard himself against the attacks from others and also to harm the oppressors.

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[62] *Ibid.*

[63] A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, Stressbur, 1897, p. 58.

[64] Pargiter, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Max Weber, *Religion of India*, 1958, p. 29.

[67] Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VIII, 'Vedic Magic', pp. 311-21.

As there was a close relation between prayers and sacrifices, persons who composed the hymns and officiated at sacrifices, developed into a class of Brahmans by the end of the Rgvedic period. It seems that in the earlier period when the hymns of the Rgveda were composed, the organisation of the Brahmans did not exist, because there were limited number of families of Brahmans and out of these only a few were made priests.

Fick says that the exclusiveness of the Brahmans as a caste existed only in theory. They had no well-organised bodies with a chief and a council. They were a body of priests who studied and meditated upon the Vedas and offered sacrifices to the gods. In Rgvedic times the office of the priest does not seem to have become hereditary as was the case later on.

According to another view, priesthood and nobility were hereditary even in the days of the Rgveda because other similar varna distinctions are to be found in other Indo-European communities, such as the patrician gents at Rome, the Eupatriade at Athens, the nobles of early Germany and the Atharvas and the Rathaesthas in Iran. The presence of similar institutions among the Indo-European peoples could not be explained if we are to think that varna in the sense of a class was unknown in the early part of the Rgvedic age.

McDonell states that these instances should not be given undue importance as none of them can prove that the warrior acted as priest or that there was a change of varna. In the period of Rgveda, a change in profession might have been possible but it was rather difficult in the case of a Brahman. It is generally believed that priesthood became hereditary, although the case of Devapi, Janka, etc., serve as exceptions to this practice.

Varna, Class and Caste

The term class in modern western political theory is generally associated with Marx. Many a scholar tried in vain to define the concept of class although the fact remains that society was divided into classes who sometimes worked in harmony and at another time struggled against each other. At the time of the Restoration in France, famous historians, Thierry, Guizot and Mignet saw in the class struggle the key to French history. Nevertheless, the question as to what is a class, or the grounds a group of people may be referred to as one class or another was still left open.

The Marxist-Leninist theory has attempted to define a class purely in terms of economic interest. In the *Great Beginning*, Lenin writes, 'Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimension of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.'[68]

In the Vedic and other ancient religious literature, there are passages which support the assumption that varna is a universal law of nature.

Society is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "an association of persons united by a common aim or interest or principle." Every known society, in this world, past, present, civilized or backward, literate or preliterate is divided naturally and automatically into these four parts of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra whether it wishes it or not. No society can escape this division. It is a law of nature. Varnas, therefore, are the automatic four divisions into which every known society is divided according to this law of nature as soon as it begins to function.

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[68] V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 421.

The word varna stands for a section of the society. Though not a class in the Marxian sense of the word but nonetheless, it refers to a mass of organized persons in the society. In a wider sense of the word, the term varna or class stands for the same meaning, i.e., a section of the society, generally organised.

Now, if this scientific law of varna is to be applied for the benefit of humanity, it is necessary to separate a particular group of people coming together with a certain collective aim as its goal, from the rest of the gathered mass of population. This social system must then be divided into four groups according to the inherent characteristics of the individuals, so that each group would be able to undertake the necessary duties of the compartment with a sense of efficiency. This, more or less, is the aim of a class in a given society.

The Marxian term class is an economic concept whereas varna is a social-cum-spiritual concept. The term class has a conflict orientation whereas the varna is cooperative notion. The Brahman as a varna had, primarily, a social status stemming from hereditary, and secondly, arising out of their qualities of head, heart and spiritual leadership. The class, on the other hand, is self-conscious, organized form of people for the protection of their economic interests. The Brahmans were supposed to be economically poor, but it implied no exploitation at all, generally associated with the economically weak class of the society.

However, the Brahmans were initially an unorganized section of the society with vast social privileges and elevated status. The term Brahma, which developed into Brahman, signified the sacerdotal group. In fact the attributes of a class are different from that of a varna.

The Brahmans as a priestly section of the society in ancient India cannot be called a class in the Marxian sense of the word. Marxist concept of a class is derived from his materialistic interpretation of history which presupposes a division of society into two classes, viz., the have and the have-nots, the privileged and the deprived.

The Marxian division of society into two classes is based on conflicting economic interests, developing into class-struggle at every stage of social evolution. Obviously, it would be misplaced to apply Marx's materialistic interpretation of history to ancient Indian Hindu society which was based on the law of varna. The Brahmans were a varna and not a class whose economic interest ever clashed with that of any other varna in the society. The Brahmans were essentially a sacredotal group but not an economic class. They were men of knowledge and generally represented the highest ethical values of the society. They were supposed to teach and preach dharma and guide both the king and people at large.

The Marxian theory of class struggle is quite different from the harmonious functioning of an ideal society based on law of varna-ashram-dharma. The varna-system seeks to explain and justify on natural and rational grounds the division of the society. The logical culmination of class struggle is revolution, resulting in the establishment of a classless state. The varna system seeks to sanctify the perpetual division of the society into groups of people on the basis of heredity and guna or karma, i.e., conduct and capability.

Just as the varna is not a class, it is not also a caste.[69] The sociologists have treated the word varna in a way emphasizing the evils that the caste system of later times had given rise to. In the usage the original meaning of the varna has been lost, and what the sociologists and social scientists feel happy about is to distort its sense. For example, in several election studies, the role of the caste factor is highlighted without reference to the basic varna phenomenon.[70] This negativism in political analysis is responsible for degrading the concept.

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[69] See Rajni Kothari, *Caste in Indian Politics*, New Delhi, 1970.

Undoubtedly, the purity of the varna system has been eroded through the ages, giving place to what is known as the caste system. An objective and dispassionate study of varna and the place of Brahmans therein has not received adequate attention of scholars.[71] Hence, a comparative study of varna and class, and varna and caste is imperative.

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[70] See M.M. Sankhdher, Genesis of the Caste System.

[71] B.R. Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras, Reflection on Politics.*

3

Socio-Political Background

A Brahman was expected to follow a life of intellectual and religious pursuits. He was supposed to be a master of vedic literature which was an indispensable qualification. A Brahman is described in the Mahavastu as a scholar learned in the Vedas and the traditional lore. There are frequent references to Brahmans proudly declaring themselves to have attained perfection in the three Vedas. The Milindapanha prescribes that the business of Brahmans and their sons is concerned with acquisition of the knowledge of Rgveda, the Yajurveda, the Samveda and the Atharvaveda. While the three Vedas are called learning (sikkha), all other kinds of knowledge are mere arts (sippas). There is a noticeable tendency to run down the importance of the knowledge of Brahmanical lore. Whereas, the Vedas have been elevated to great heights.

Although the Buddhists and the Jains questioned the Brahmanical superiority, yet they refrained from challenging the Vedas. They only challenged the priestly Brahman's ability to interpret the Vedas in the true spirit. They criticized the Brahman priests for their pre-occupation with their external formalities of religious rituals, forgetting the true spirit of the Vedas. Similarly the Buddhists, who disagreed with the Vedic religion (which was incompatible with their philosophy) did not disparage the Vedas which were held by them in great respect.

However, the range of study of a learned Brahman was not confined to the study of Vedas.[1]

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[1] One cannot be sure about the exact nature of these eighteen sciences. In the Milindapanha in connection with king Milinda's learning we meet the following passage: "Many were the arts and sciences he knew-holy traditions and secular law; the Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya and Vaisesika systems of philosophy;

A Brahman is also described as a master of eighteen sciences, besides the Vedas. The Vedas were to be taught along with the knowledge of their lexicography, prosody, grammar, and legends attached to them. As such, ạ Brahman would become a philologist and grammarian, skilled alike in cauistry (hetu) and in the knowledge of the bodily marks that foreshadow the greatness of a man.

The subjects that a Brahman scholar should study are four Vedas, Itihasa, Pranas, Lexicography, prosody, phonology, verses, grammar, etymology, astrology, the six Vedangas, arithmetic, science of interpretations of various omens and natural phenomena, divination and prognostications. All this encyclopaedic knowledge enhanced the reputation of a Brahman as a scholar and a pandit.

Qualities

Pure Descent

The Vedas attach a great importance to the purity of descent. In the Panchavimsa Brahmana, the Vatsa is said to have passed a fire ordeal to prove his descent. At the same time, the knowledge of a person was given priority over purity of his descent. Studentship, for example, was offered, regardless of the varna consideration of the student. In the Brahmanas and the Rgveda, the Kavasa is described as the son of a slave girl. Therefore, in the lists of Pravaras, enumerating the ancestory of the purohitas, as also in the sacraments, the knowledge of one or more ancestors

arithmetic; music; medicine; the four Vedas, the Puranas, and the Itihasas; astronomy, magic, causation, and spells, the art of war; poetry, conveyancing - in a word the "whole nineteen". Milinda, p.3. See also Rhys Davids, SBE, XXXV, p. 6.

was considered essential. At the Vajapeya sacrifice, a priest was allowed to partake some draught only when he proved that his ten ancestors had partaken it in ancient times.

Good conduct was considered to be an essential requisite of a Brahman. According to the Satapatha Brahman, he should be merciful and kind to all and should also speak the truth. It is stated by the Aitareya Brahman that the Syaparnas were dismissed from service by Visvantara on account of their telling a lie.

The study of the Vedas, along with other subsidiary works, was considered as the most essential duty of a Brahman. The knowledge of the Vedas was not restricted to the Brahmans. Men of other higher castes could also acquire this knowledge. The Satapatha Brahman refers to certain kings who were well-versed in the knowledge of the Brahma and the Vedas and even the Brahmans approached them for the sake of this knowledge.

The Katha Samhita enjoins the study of the Vedas upon all men, not necessarily because it is possible that the latter might have studied (Vedic) lore. The Taittirya Samhita and the Satapath Brahman also lay stress on study. The Satapatha Brahman describes the virtues of Svadhyaya in detail. It says that the study of the Vedas is a source of great joy to a learned srotriya. He becomes learned and independent of others. He acquires wealth day by day. He sleeps peacefully and is the best physician for himself. He observes restraints of senses and delights in the growth of intelligence, fame and the task of perfecting the people.

Therefore, it was his sacred duty to acquire the knowledge of the three Vedas. Those men (Brahmans or others) who had acquired such knowledge were designated as Tri-Sukria or Trisukar. Itihass, Purana, Gatha, Narasamsi, Brhmodya, Anusansana, Anvyakhyana, Kalpa, Brahman Vidya, Ksatra Vidya, Devajanavidya, Naksatra Vidya, Bhuta Vidya, Sarpa Vidya, Atharvangiras Vidyas, Daiva, Nidhi, Pitrya, Rasi, Sutra, etc., are prescribed as the subjects for study.

The superiority of the Vedic knowledge to all other knowledge is declared by Sayana in the following words. The Veda expounds the truth about gods, dharma and parabrahma, he who does not recite the Veda but only utters secular speech full of slanders, falsehood and strife cannot have access to true knowledge. Thus, the study of the Vedic texts made the Brahman worthy of gifts offered by kings like Janaka and Ajatasatru, and others. In certain cases women were also said to have possessed the sacred knowledge.

For sacrifices, such as Dasaratra and Asvamdna, the learned Brahmans were invited. Discussions on different subjects were held in learned assemblies, and one who would outshine was given the title of Kavi or Vipra. Thus, the Brahmans, learned in the art of shastra-artha, were engaged in intellectual pursuits. A particular type of discussion was called Brahmodya or Brahma-Vadya, in which generally philosophical matters were discussed.

The Rgveda states that there were some learned assemblies where the Brahmans of vedic learning (Sakhyah) came together (samyajante) for the purpose of advancing their search for truth which was discovered through experience or intuition or mental exercise (manasojavesu). Sayana calls these learned assemblies as Brahman-Samghas. The ignorant were kept away from these learned assemblies. Those who were not as competent or talented as the Brahmans, were considered fit only for the plough or the loom.

During the period of later Samhitas and Brahman, we do not often hear of Vidatha, i.e., an assembly. It is said that Agni, the chief priest, was elected in a Vidatha. But the presence of the priest (hota) in the Vidatha proves that the priests or Brahmans were represented in their individual capacity and not as a class.

Preachers of Dharma

The Brahmans as a varna were declared[2] not only to be the preachers of dharma (duty) but also the friends, philosophers and guides of the whole world. The risis who were presented as holding long discussions and giving discourses on theological matters, were often described as semi-divine beings.[3] The mythology seems to connect them with celestial regions and duties. Most of the scriptures were composed or compiled by the Brahmans themselves. One may easily find an exceedingly enormous mass of dicta emphasizing the supreme importance of the Brahman in the religious life of the people. However, the tradition ascribing authorship of the Mahabharata and the Puranas to Krsnadvaipayana Vyasa is an exception.

It is said that like fire concealed within wood, everything that is said or heard or read in this world was enshrined in the Brahman. Upon them depends the course of conduct to be followed by men, even as the existence of all creatures depends upon the rain of Vasva (Indra). The Brahman were the authors of all regulations which governed the world. They were conversant with all the dharmas duties. They were supposed to be possessed of minute vision. They were considered to be the guides whom all should follow.

Again, they were described[4] to be the upholders of all sacrifices and also shouldering the rich heritage bequeathed by the norms of traditional dharma. These self-assertions of the devices and efforts of the Brahman, formed an important part in the religious transformation of the period. They were undoubtedly of a considerable significance. It is best shown by the main tendencies and changes brought about in the orthodox fold to overcome the setbacks suffered by the Vedic tradition. They also helped develop a synthetic religious system which responded to the heterodox challenge.

[2] Mbh. XIII. 147.25.
[3] *Ibid.*, XII. 318.6.
[4] *Ibid.*, XIII. 136.8.

Thus, the Brahman as the authors of the Smritis, Epics and Puranas reasserted the authority of the Vedas, reiterated the Grhya rites, and revived the Vedic sacrifices with a considerable success. This reassertion and revitalisation of the orthodox Vedic tradition by cultural assimilation has been corroborated by the contemporary literary, epigraphic and numismatic sources.

Function and Role

In the ancient times, the Brahmans were the real intellectual leaders who controlled education. It was mainly due to a highly stimulating intellectual life that they could establish their supremacy over the rest of the people. The scope of their intellectual interests and activities was so wide that it should have embraced the whole range of worship, dogma, and philosophical speculations, closely interwoven with one and other.

In later times, the Brahman had the exclusive official privilege of performing the sacrifices. Thus, the priests were always recruited from amongst them. But no such indication is given by the hymns of the Rgveda. The institution of priesthood has a history behind it. Some scholars, unlike the orthodox ones, trace this institution to the times of the unseparated Indo-Aryans who had similar institutions. When a part of them came to India, it is believed, they had brought the institution of priesthood along with them, allowing any one to act as the priest, regardless of caste considerations.

The development of society made priesthood a specialized craft, probably absorbing non-Aryan priests in the new body. This, however, is not a plausible explanation in view of the difficulty created by the existence of priesthood among the Indo-Aryan people. Besides, it does not conform to the dominant theory of the origin and evolution of priesthood as an exclusive Brahman institution. While all classical writers and legendary figures, such as Manu, Patanjali and Vatsyayan accepted the four-fold varna system with the Brahman at the apex. However, there are some isolated texts like Milindapanha which are in accord with the Buddhist doctrine which places the Kshatriyas at the top.

A Brahman does not depend on others. He cooks his own food, wears his own apparel, bestows his own alms. The other mortals subsist only on the benevolence of the Brahman.

Brahmans and Monarchy

The traditional cultural development fused the Brahman and Kshatriya classes into an inseparable bond of mutual co-operation. In the early stages of the Vedic society the Brahman priest and the Kshatriyas, loosely distinct on occupational basis, emerged as the Brahma and Kshatra powers,[5] co-operating actively in the cultural tussle[6] with non-Aryan elements, divided sharply and symbolically by the varna[7] (colour) factor.

The priestly class was associated with the Vedic state, whether republican[8] or monarchial.[9] But as time rolled on, the priests became champions of monarchical polity. In ancient times ritual ceremonies were a part of public life. This raised the priestly class to a distinct position in the society. The priest, through the agency of rituals in the coronation ceremony, could raise the king above tribal control. Thus, making him supreme.

A king, consecrated by the Purohita with the Mahbhiseka of Indra, establishes his way round the earth on every side.[10] The evolution of sacerdotalism marks the development of monarchical polity to a considerable extent. The dynamic function of the symbolic forms as instituted in consecration ceremonies and the various sacrifices like asvamedha, rajasuya, vajapeya etc. seems to be responsible for it.[11] The imperial status was also categorized on the basis of rituals.[12]

[5] RV, III. 53.12.

[6] *Ibid.* I. 51.8; I. II. 7.21; III. 29.9.

[7] *Ibid.*, II. 12.4; I. 179.6.

[8] Pandey, IHC, Proceedings, 1952, p. 72.

[9] K.P. Jayaswal, HP, 1934, second edition, p. 189.

[10] ABr. VIII. 21-23.

[11] A.S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, Banaras, 1949, pp. 25, 57-58.

[12] ABr., VIII. 15.

Through the help of priestly class, king gained enormous powers and freed himself of tribal control, especially in times of miltary operations. The active co-operation of the Brahman and Ksatra powers is required in such times, for, even the gods could be defeated by the Asuras.[13] Since the king was to protect the varna-asrma-dharma and the people against various challenging forces, including those of heterodoxy. He was accorded an uncommon status of superhuman or divine,[14] so that his words and actions may be religiously honoured by the people.

In this case the Ksatra power was no less important than the Brahman power, the former was also to acquire divine status like the latter. Manu asserts that the king consists in his person the eternal elements of deities like- agni, vayu, the surya, kubera and varuna.[15] Thus the divinity of the king was not a theoretical proposition. The Kusana kings are called devaputras.[16] The evidence is found in the Allahabad Pillar Inscriptions. Samudragupta is described to have the potentiality of the Kikaplas and he is said to be possessed of the attributes of Visnu incarnated.

Thus the polity of the Vedic orthodox tradition ascribes divine status to the king, unlike the Buddhist Cakkavatti Dhammika Dhammaraja, who established the rule of dharma in all the four quarters. He says that the king does not possess divine element in his person nor is he a deity in human form. Even Asoka, who approximated the Buddhist conception of kingship was only a 'Beloved of God'.

The divine king used to take a solemn pledge at his coronation to preserve the Vedic religion.[17] He was the protector of the Brahmans[18] and was entrusted to preserve and establish varna-ashrama-dharma in the society.[19] Yajnavalkya entrusts him with a greater responsibility, viz., to establish the 'Svadharmas' of the various societies, e.g., of the families (Kula), castes (Jati), guilds (Sreni), corporations (Gana) and of particular regions (Janapada). The Brahmans could take up arms if the king so required.[20]

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[13] *Ibid.*, 1.14.

[14] Ghoshal, AHIPI, 1959, pp. 24-25.

[15] Manu, VII. 3-7.

[16] B.N. Puri, India Under the Kushanas, Bombay, 1965, pp. 16, 73.

[17] Mbh., XII. 59.112.

[18] Manu, VII. 35.83, 133-34.

The varna duties are at times explained to have originated from the political order (Rajdharma).[21] Thus "human power, government, and punishment became sacramental phenomena, by which divine forces could impinge upon the lives of men".[22] Such provisions gave religious ideologies a solid political ban and tremendously widened the operational range of political power.

Image of True Brahmans

The Mahabharata declares that righteousness, truthfulness, self-control, asceticism, lack of malice, performance of sacrificial ceremonies, gifts, patience, learning etc., were the vows of a Brahman.[23] Likewise, in the Bhagavadgita, it is said that control of the senses, austerities, purity, forgiveness, straight forwardness of mind and body, belief in God, knowledge of the sacred lore and God based on direct experience are the natural duties of the Brahmans.[24]

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[19] GDS, XI. 9-10.

[20] R.N. Sharma, *Brahmins Through the Ages*, Delhi, 1977, pp. 125-26.

[21] Mbh., XII.

[22] Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, London, 1967.

[23] Mbh., V. 43.12, cf. BE. V. 45.5.

[24] Gita, XVIII. 42.

The idea of Sattva (virtuous) elements is emphasised in Bhagvadgita[25] and also in the Manusmriti.[26] The Anugita lays down that the dark shadow of ignorance, delusion, indecision, haughtiness, fear, malice, grief, irrationality, fading memory, dull intelligence, etc., lead a Brahman to degeneration.[27] A true Brahman, who possesses the qualities of penance, learning, true knowledge of the doctrine of metapsychosis of the world, of the nature of emancipation, of tranquility and of Brahmanic glory, gets absolved of the sins committed in his past life and achieves supreme bliss and reunion with the divine.

The ignoble Brahmans are condemned outright. Such Brahmans are described as the fire of straw which is of no worth.[28] They fall to the status of the Sudras together with their progeny.[29] Acceptance of gift by a brahman devoid of austerities and Vedic studies leads him to hell.[30] These qualities and attributes of the Brahman seek to present this class as an ideal in the society. It was supposed to inculcate morality in the people by establishing friendly relations with them. An orthodox law-giver like Manu, goes to the extreme to say that whether he performs the rites or neglects them, he who befriends all creatures, is declared to be a true Brahman.[31] The Gautama Dharma Sutra[32] and the Mahabharata[33] have expressed the same view almost in the same wordings.

The Visnu Purana exhorts that a Brahman should always strive to bring welfare to all the creatures. Friendship with all of them is his best treasure.[34] He should be friendly with everybody who

[25] Vide Gita, XVI. 1-3.

[26] Manu, XII. 31, of. Vis, pp. 1.6.3-5.

[27] Anugita, XXI. II, cf. SBE, II p-317.

[28] VDS, II. II.

[29] Manu, II. 168.

[30] *Ibid.*, IV. 190-4; IV.1p.

[31] *Ibid.*, II. 87.

[32] GDS, XXVI. II.

[33] Mbh., XII. 230.13.

[34] Mbh., BE. XIII. 151.10-12.

comes in contact with him.[35] It is the moral duty of a wealthy Brahman to support a beseeching Kshatriya or a Vaisya fallen in distress by giving him suitable work.[36] If he neglects this provision, the king is enjoined upon to make the Brahman observe the same.[37]

But in case the initiated twice-borns are reduced to servitude against their will by the wealthy Brahman, the latter is liable to a fine of six hundred panas[38].

It clearly shows that inspite of the claims of superiority in status, the Brahman was not permitted to exploit a situation by taking undue advantage of his position and wealth. It was emphatically asserted that only virtuous Brahman could emancipate the society.[39]

The Bhagavata Purana lays down that the Brahmana's physical birth is not meant for indulgence in worldly luxury and pleasure. Instead, he must lead a hard life of austerity which brings him infinite bliss in the heaven. A virtuous life for a Brahman was so much emphasized, that the Mahabharata, at places, does not recognize Brahmanhood by birth. It is said that truthfulness, generosity, freedom from hatred and wickedness, humility, kindness, and tapas— in whomsoever these are seen, is a true Brahman. These attributes would be regarded as Brahmans by the gods.[40] This view resembles the Buddhist conception of Brahmanhood but it is hardly palatable to the orthodox law-givers.

Nevertheless, it shows that spirit of the age which held these qualities to be essential in a Brahman. Patanjali in a passage states that, besides birth, tapasya and Vedic study were also the factors which made a man, a Brahman.[41] There must always have been such Brahmans, who zealously adhered to these ideals which became intimately identified with their varna. Bhasa informs that Brahmans, even in old age, were devoted to the study of Vedas. They used to master various branches of learning and practised penance and asceticism. They are mentioned to be learned in the Vedas, together with their six appendices, and that they performed the six-fold duty and led virtuous lives.

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[35] Mbh., XII. 63.5.

[36] Mbh., V. 43.12, cf. BE. V. 45.5.

[37] Manu, VIII. 411.

[38] *Ibid.*, VIII. 412; vide also Commentators Medhatithi, Govindaraja, and Kulluka on the same.

[39] VDS, VI. 25.

[40] Vrddha Gautama, p. 632; cf. Kane, HDS, II, pt. II, p. 101.

Kalidasa also describes Brahmans as observing the Upanayana ceremony, earning by accepting daksina, and devoted to the studies of vidyas (different branches of knowledge). It must have been on account of their virtuous life that they were recognized to be superior in status in society[42] and were given due reverence. People would bestow the best of their possessions in order to secure blessings of the Brahmans.

The Mahabharata gives a valuable information about the status and the image of the true Brahmans and discusses the phenomenon of caste deviation. Some passages show how the authors, representing the orthodox school, viewed their relative status. For example, it is mentioned that those Brahmans who took up the professions of rtvik, purohita, kings' councillor, envoy and messenger, were reduced to the position of the Kshatriyas. This is somewhat unusual because these offices were conferred on the Brahmans by the law-givers. But this judgement was based on the criterion of status evaluation on the spiritual plane.

The elucidation of these contra-ideal types of Brahmans reduced to the position of Chandala, Sudra, Vaisya,shows that while caste came to be determined by birth the actual status of a person in society depended largely on karma (action) and actual vocation. Apparently, when both birth and karma status fall apart, opposing each other, unique contra-ideal types of castes are produced. This phenomenon led to the bracketing of two caste names together, in order to represent the spurious status like Brahma-Ksatra[43] or Brahman-Chandala.

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[41] Patanjali on Panini, II. 26; vide Mahabhasya, I, p. 411; II, p. 362.

[42] Patanjali on Panini, VI. 2.36.

Status of the Brahman

The role of Brahman or priest became institutionalized in the course of time with the Vedic ritual ceremonies, and sacrifices having become enormously complicated. The chain of sacraments from birth to death made the services of priest highly important. The esoteric science of ritualism required a highly expert hand to execute them.

The growing need of the performance of sacrifice and witchcraft as an important instrument for defence of the king and the people was realized. If a king wanted to defeat the army of an enemy, he was to approach a Brahman for consecrating the war charriot with all sorts of incantations which would, it was believed, help the king in securing victory. In such a ceremony the importance of the Brahman-priest was great as he was the heart of the sacrifice.[44]

According to a passage in the Rgveda, the people themselves paid respect to those kings who respected the Brahmans.[45] In the Satapatha Brahman,[46] while bringing out symbolically the mutual relationship between the spiritual power and the material power, the superiority of the spiritual power is asserted. Nevertheless the cooperation between the two for mutual success was underlined.

In the period of the Brahmanical literature, there arose a myth which represents sacrifice as the first act in cosmology.[47] The sacrifice is like a ship sailing heavenwards. The gods are dependent on what is offered to them in the ceremonies. Sacrifice was efficacious in fetching material gains and well-being in the next world.[48] The giving of gifts was regarded as the most essential part of sacrifice. The cult of sacrifice was an immensely creative force which kept together the kings and the priests in their vital roles in economic, social, religious and political spheres.

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[43] Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India*, Asia Publishing House, 1966, pp. 164-67.

[44] SBr., XII. 8.2.23.

[45] RV, IV. 50.8.

[46] SBr., IV. 1.4.1-6.

[47] A. Barth, *Religions of India*, London, 1921, p. 37.

The above sketch of the Brahman's position amply proves that during the later Vedic period they not only acquired unprecedented superiority in spiritual matters but shared an important position in state transactions too. They were entitled to become members of political bodies like the Sabhas.[49] It is rightly said that though the Brahman was sometimes in danger of losing the privilege of his position owing to the caprice or tyranny of his patron, the importance of the Purohita's office, was stressed not only for the religious needs of the kings, but also for the security and welfare of kingdom.

The Brahmanical literature elaborates the Vedic rituals and cult of sacrifice based on fire worship. The esoteric nature of mantra was preserved and it should not be taught[50] to an undeserving person. How important a mantra was can be imagined by the fact that even a son who was author of mantra could rightfully address his father as boy.

Besides, the cult of sacrifice developed as the magical power. It also become a convenient means for the Brahmans to claim divinity for themselves. They were said to be divinely protected and were described as having superhuman status.[51] They were regarded as human gods[52] in a visible form on earth and were entitled to receive presents (daksina).[53] Later, of course, the whole edifice of the socio-religious system based on the hierarchical pretentions declined because of the attack launched by heterodox teachers of the non-Vedic cultural religion on the orthodox school.

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[48] Keith, RPVU, p. 461.

[49] TSam., VII. 1.8, cf. Govind Prasad Upadhyay, *Brahmanas in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1979.

[50] ABr., V. 33.

[51] AV, VI. 13.1.

[52] SBr., II.2.2.6; IV. 3.4.4.

[53] *Ibid.*, II. 2.10.6.

The Brahmans were closely connected with the process which transformed their duties into great gods and raised their position in social life. At one place in the *Santi Parva*, in a subtle philosophical plane the Vipras (Brahmans)) are identified with Sankarasana. His act of Brahanicide[54] reminds us of the similar act of Indra in regard to Vrtra. Its real import may be quite different from showing antipathy to the Brahmans.

The positive heterodox challenge against the Brahmans' claims and pretensions was met with added vigour in our age. Brahman authors made assertions of their status even without any reference to the varna. Manu declares that of all created beings, the most excellent are said to be those who are animated; of those who are animated, the most excellent are the ones who subsist by intelligence; of the intelligent mankind and of men, the most excellent are the Brahman.[55] Being sprung from the superior part (mouth) of Brahma and as the first-born he possesses the Veda, he is by birthright, the lord of this whole creation.[56]

In claiming a superior status for the Brahman on the ground of his being first-born, the Upanisadic theory that the Brahman alone existed in the beginning, has been alluded to The Mahabharata, too, states this theory of varna origin, maintaining that the other varnas came to be differentiated on account of the differences in karma.[57] Manu held that as the Brahman is the protector of the treasury of law, he is the lord of all created beings.[58] Whatever exists in this world is his property.[59]

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[54] Bhag. P., X. 78.21 cf. Upadhyay, *op.cit.*

[55] Manu, I. 96.

[56] *Ibid.*, I. 93.

[57] Mbh., XII. 181.10-14.

[58] Manu, I. 99.

[59] *Ibid.*, I. 100.

Moreover, these authors assert the conception of the Brahmans divinity in the traditional tone.[60] He is held as a human god[61] — a visible deity on earth. Manu goes to the extreme when he says that a Brahman by the very fact of his birth is an object of worship even to the deities.[62] The Mahabharata puts forward the same dictum.[63] The shortcomings of the Vrata, austerities and sacrificial rites are eradicated when the Brahmans support them. Brahman's words are the words of gods. They embody all the gods in time.

This conception of Brahman's divinity was developed to the extent of sanctifying his very person. The Brahman is a great divinity, just like fire, who is not contaminated even in burial grounds.[64] Any abusive word uttered to him requires explanation by purificatory rites.[65] It is purifying to have speech with him. If a person of the lowest caste sacrifices life in order to rescue a Brahman out of danger, he gets the heavenly bliss.[66]

Much arrogance and vanity are visible in the Brahman's self-assertions. But we cannot overlook that the general social background of the period in which contemporary authors were attempting the standardization of the social order was in no way less challenging. Moreover, Brahmans attempt at social systematization must have required of them a sense of self-consciousness flowing from their own traditional status as a driving force in solving the problems of an orthodox society. The part played by them in the preservation of the orthodox culture from the Vedic period onwards was a factor which called upon them to respond against antagonism, and at the same time made them increasingly conscious of their own status. Therefore, their role depended as much on their status, as their claim for that status was dependent on their role in society.

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[60] SBr., I. 2.1.6.

[61] Manu, IX. 317, cf. Mbh., XIII. 137.21 (a)

[62] *Ibid.*, XI. 85.

[63] *Ibid.*, BE. XIII. 35.21.

[64] ADS, II. 5.12.6-7, cf. Manu, IX. 317-318.

[65] Vis. Sm., 48.22

[66] Manu, VIII.349; X. 62; Mbh., XIII. 48.33-35

Above all, the priestly section of the Brahman class had been a very important factor in society. The priestly functions, monopolized by them, were among the six standard duties of the Brahmans. Mastery over elaborate priest craft and the sole custodianship of ritualism gave them not only a unity but also superior position in the ritual matters vis-a-vis other sections of the society. Ritualism was so closely allied with the social status that the right to the Vedic sacraments and rites became the basis of the twice-born caste structure. An eminent sociologist holds the view[67] that "in the caste system the primary emphasis is on status evaluator or ritual plane......." A Kshatriya king may be powerful and a Vaisya trader may be rich, but their ritual status will be rated lower than that of the poorest Brahman. This was undoubtedly a sure basis of the Brahman's claim for superiority.

But there was still another factor which not only served as the basis of status evaluation but gave the Brahmans a moral stature over other sections or groups. This status evaluation was reckoned on a spiritual plane.[68] On the philosophic plane on the other hand, the word Brahma is Brahman which frees the Brahmans from the priestly confinement and also from other vices like violence and sacrifice, greed, dependence on kings and nobility, etc. These interpretations lead to that section of the Brahmans who practise realization, penance, austerities, meditation and lived a rigorously ethical life. They followed the doctrine of detachment and even renunciation embracing asceticism. These two categories of the Brahmans neatly corresponded to doctrinal differentiations of Pravrtti and Nivrtti paths. The society was dominated by both types of Brahmans, though side by side a doctrinal synthesis was arrived at[69].

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[67] Dube, *Women in the New Asia*, ed. Barabara C. Ward, UNESCO, 1963, p. 176.

[68] 'Spiritual Status' is taken to be referring to that position of the Brahmans which was based on Upanisadic discipline. The Brahmans who cultivated or led an ethical or moral life, in consonance with the general attributes of the Brahmavadins of the Upanisadic tradition are found in the Epic and Puranic literature. The 'spiritual status' could not necessarily be taken as contrary to the ritual status. This philosophy of life lay greater emphasis on the ethical and spiritual values rather than ritualistic observances of the Srauta and Smarta traditions.

In the Manusmriti itself, status is evaluated at a spiritual plane. Manu lays down that wealth, kindred, age, rites and sacred knowledge (vaidya) make a man respectful but each one of them carries more weight than the preceding ones. Among the members of the three upper varnas whosoever has greater amount of these five qualities deserves greater respect.[70]

Again, enumerating the comparative superiority of the Brahmans' attributes, he adds that "of Brahmans, those learned (in the Vedas) of learned, those who recognized (the necessity and manner of performing the prescribed duties); of those who possess this knowledge, those who perform them; of the performers, those who know the Brahman",[71] are the most excellent ones.

Manu, while emphasizing ritualistic functions of the Brahmans, gives precedence to the Upanisadic trend holding the Brahmavadin Brahman supreme in status.

The Mahabharata echoes the same sentiment that the Brahman is the highest light, he is the highest 'tapas'.[72] Theoretically, the attempt of co-ordination of these two planes of status evaluation, as in the above-mentioned passage of Manu, makes the Brahman's position much elevated. It is rightly observed,[73] "when the Vedic gods were resolved in an ultimate principle immanent in nature, or, as is the case of Prajapati, represented as a personification of the creative process, of the priestly offering as the all-sustaining rite gave the Brahmans their unique position in the cosmic order and social structure, transcending that of the Gods".

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[69] Pravrttam ca nivrttam ca dvividham Karma vaidikam. Manu, XII. 88(b); also XII. 89-90.

[70] Manu, II. 136-37 (a).

[71] Manu, I. 97; vide SBE, XXV, p. 25, cf. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, London, 1927, p. 22.

[72] Mbh., BE. XIII. 33.17 (a).

[73] E.O. James, *The Nature and Function of Priesthood*, London, 1955, p. 290.

The authors asserted the superior status of the Brahmans as traditionally sanctioned. Once 'ascribed' status was assigned to the Brahmans as it was not left over to be filled through competition.[74] However, even this 'ascribed' status required attempt at integration and consolidation.

Further, the co-ordination of the two bases of status has its own advantages. The spiritual status could not provide as much homogeneity to the Brahmans as was accorded to them by priestly functions. Besides, the spiritual knowledge and ascetic view of life could not be absolutely the monopoly of the Brahmans for even a Kshatriya or a Vaisya or, in some cases, even a Sudra could sacrifice his worldly attachments in favour of self-abnegation.

Social Control

A Brahman's social systematization was directed to maintain and consolidate the framework of varna-ashrama-dharma. The Brahman law-givers strengthened the orthodox social structure by a network of systematization and adopting effective techniques against the disintegrating forces of challenging it from various quarters. The orthodox society required systematization and standardization of the social structure to consolidate itself against the troubles of rapid political changes, unprecedented alien contracts, antagonistic religious movements, enormous socio-political pressure of the non-varna people and tribes, and the problems created by the impact of economic transformations.

It is said that any sudden or rapid changes create crisis in the whole system of social behaviour and make apparent the necesity of new controls.[75] The measures evolved for curbing deviations tend to exercise control[76] on individual behaviour. The preservation of the varna structure in its theory and practice, was of vital importance for the interiorization of the orthodox cultural ideologies which granted political, religious, and economic power and prestige to the twice-borns, (shared by them in relative degrees).

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[74] R. Linton, "Status and Role", in Lewis A. Coser and B. Rosenberg, eds., *Sociological Theory*, New York, 1964, p. 360; see also p. 358.

[75] Gillin and Gillin, *An Introduction to Sociology*, New York, 1947, p. II.

The orthodox ideal of social life, varnasrama system, was sought to be protected. The primary duties of the king was to uphold the varna system. The laws of Manu seek to establish the cult of power, i.e., supremacy of danda in order to promote dharma and the general welfare of the society[77]and prevent the mixture of castes.[78] He says God has created the king to protect the varnas and the ashramas.[79] Authors like Apastamba,[80] Baudhyana,[81] Gautama,[82] Vasistha,[83] Kautilya,[84] and works of Yajnavalkyasmriti, the Visnu Smriti, the Puranas, Narada-smriti, the Atrisambita, etc. have exhorted the king to maintain the varna-ashrama-dharma; which, in crisis, may be upheld even with the help of arms.[85] The kings took pride in putting these injunctions into practice.

The Vedic texts emphasized the mutual cooperation of the spiritual and the temporal powers, where the king is described protector of dharma, Brahmans and the people. But the keen desires of later authors utilizing kings political office for the preservation and promotion of the varna-ashrama-dharma caused troubles for orthodoxy.

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[76] '*Social Control*' seems to be a significant term for our study. It is taken to be a collective term for those processes, planned or unplanned, by which individuals are taught, persuaded, or compelled to conform to usages or life-values of groups. vide Joseph S. Roucek, Social Control,II Ed., New York, 1956, p. 3

[77] Manu, VII. 17-23; see Radcliffe-Brown, "Organized Sanctions negative or Penal", in ESS, XIII, pp. 532-33.

[78] *Ibid.*, VII. 24.

[79] Manu, VII. 35, cf. Mbh., XIII. 153.31.

[80] ADS, II. 1.2.2-3.

[81] BDS, II. 2.4.4.1.

[82] GDS, VII. 25.

[83] VDS, XIX. 1-8.

[84] KA, I. 3.17.

[85] *Ibid.*, I. 3.14.

Another category of social control is the self-interest, whether direct or indirect. The most glaring self-interest of the Brahmans was the consolidation of their own status which granted them rank, privileges and power. There are many sources describing the power-position of the Brahmans. Through monopoly of accumulated knowledge, mastery of priest craft, and traditional law they were able to exert influence on society.[86] They brought considerable changes in society by laying down various norms, beliefs, tenets and ideals and by following the ethical[87] way of life. This gained them a position in the society and to guide the people to uphold their traditional duties.

The influence of the Brahmans could operate even without the support of state power. The Brahman laid greater emphasis on political sanction, which by implication means that they sought active support of the 'coercive power'[88].

Political power is especially required in the case of the failure of other forms of influences on society. In fact, political power is one of the most important factors in the consolidation of their (Brahmans) status. Control through religious institutions adds punitive power of the state to their teaching and influences. While the state, in turn, used religious sanctions to maintain its control.[89] In spite of these facts, the power-position of the Brahmans, in general, was more of the influence position of the Brahmans in their relation to both the state and the people. If power means the capacity to carry out, by whatever means, a

[86] Mbh. BE. XIII. 151.10-12. Critical Edition, XIII. 136.2.23.

[87] Manu, IV. 186.

[88] Ivan D. Steiner and Martin Fishein, eds., *Current Studies in Social Psychology*, New York, 1965, p. 373; Coser and Rosenber, eds., *Sociological Theory, op. cit.*, p. 146.

[89] Roucek, *Social Control,* New York, 1956, 2nd Ed., p. 104.

object was neither more nor less than to exalt the Brahman, to feed his pride and to minister to his self-will. Senart says that the Brahman, legislators obeyed, more or less willingly, a personal and selfish tendency, the operation of which is everywhere patent, and finally deprived their work of the authority of a straightforward document. Before all else their aim was to establish the absolute supremacy of the Brahmans.[99] This observation is, however, an extreme view and highly influenced by the smriti literature which is tempered by extra-Brahmanic flavour. These generalized views challenging the orthodox society, fail to correctly read the situation.

If the term Brahmanic hierarchy is taken to mean priestly government, it has to be rejected forthwith.[100] The Brahman priests never formed any well organised body, never had undue sway on politics. The 'gotras' and 'pravars' were educational institutions, whiie the old Parisads, which disintegrated quickly, were corporate bodies of such Brahmans who had little concern with politics, although they used to interpret law when it was referred to them. Alongside there were the Parisads of the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas also. The influence of the priests on government was at its height in the later Vedic period, but it suffered seriously at the hands of heterodoxy as well as under the strong pressures of the Upanisadic flux. The alliance of the Buddhist movement with political power accentuated the heterodox challenge against priestly dominance, which is marked by the abolition of sacrifices and the priestly offices, especially at the hands of Asoka.

The Brahmans superior status in society was equally shared by the Sramanas, for so often both of them are bracketed together in Asokan inscriptions. Besides, whatever homogeneity the Brahmanic class got from priestly functions and Vedic studies, it progressively broke up since the Brahmans enmass were taking up secular professions of all grades. Further, Brahmans as royal chaplains, were losing the estimation of the ritual circles in desired course of action, despite the resistence of others, then the Brahman did not exercise such an absolute authority. As far as the legitimacy[90] of the Brahmans claim to power-position is concerned, it was based on the tradition.[91]

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[99] E. Senart, *Caste in India,* London, 1930, pp. 105-6.

[100] Rao, vide QJAHRS, July 1928; October 1929.

The Brahman law-givers adopted the ingenious technique of ontological orientation to consolidate the social system. The ideal of svadharma had metaphysical sanctions. The theories of karma and transmigration of soul are duly identified[92] with the harnessed social psychology in order to strengthen the social structure.

Twelfth chapter of the Manusmriti is devoted to the application of this theory. Manu declares that all actions of a man produce, without fail, either good or bad results.[93] The consequence of any action originated through mental sin leads to low-caste birth in the next life.[94] The judgement of Yama is impending on all the actions of the individual.[95]

The action of man is judged by the standard of social morality and traditional values accepted as proper for different varnas.[96] Value judgement of action is guided by Satvika, Rajasa, and Tamasa attributes, which human karma is bound to cause as its result. Merit or demerit gained by actions brings for the individual either the state of gods and human beings or the life of beasts in the next birth.[97]

To Sheering, the caste system was 'the most baneful, hardhearted and cruel social system that could possibly be invented for damning the human race.'[98] According to him, its contrast to the Brahmans following the Nivrtti path or those who were independent of royal patronage and control. Even the later authors hold the royal chaplain only as a priest in the service of the king. In spite of his high claims, the tenure of the chaplain's office was not quite secure before the political power of the king. These considerations apart, the very fact that the scheme of functional divisions of the classes requires a Brahman to shun any ambition for political power. Moreover, except for the few Brahman priests, Brahmans true to their standard duties had too precarious an economic position to exert any undue pressure on the state in general.

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[90] Ivan D. Steiner, *Current Studies in Social Psychology*, New York, 1965, pp. 371-81.

[91] Goldhamer and Shils, "Power and Status", in Coser and Rosenberg, eds., *Sociological Theory, op. cit.*, pp. 134-35.

[92] Manu, XII. 40-41; Yaj., III. 137-9; see Radcliffe Brown, "Religious Sanction", ESS, XIII, pp. 531-32.

[93] Manu, XII.3.

[94] *Ibid.*, XII. 9.

[95] *Ibid.*,X. 21.

[96] *Ibid.*, XII. 31-33.

[97] *Ibid.*, XII. 40

[98] Sheering, *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, London, 1872, III, p. 293.

The priest, who at the outset was the sole guardian of the written word, "was at once jurist, medical authority, mathematician, astronomer, historian, philologist, natural scientist... and political theorist. But as these functions came to be taken by the specialized groups within the community, the prestige of the priest inveitably suffered."[101]

This tendency of the Christian priesthood can be equally applied to Indian priests, but with reservation because liberal education and learning in ancient India remained in the hands of the Brahmans. But even before the second century B.C. the Brahmans were adopting secular vocations of different grades. Vassakara and Kautilya as statesmen and politicians were in a secular profession. Manu, like Kautilya, differentiates between a priest and a Brahman minister.

The ten types of Brahmans in the Jatakas, the six types in the Mahabharata, and ten kinds of them in the Atri Samhita put them in utterly different professions, presenting to us the contra-ideal types of Brahmans, far from priestly functions.

The adoption of the secular professions by Brahmans reduces all possibilities of priestly hierarchy. In spite of the efforts of the law-givers, after the Upanisadic upheaval and heterodox challenges, the priestly sections of the Brahmans were not able to regain their lost position.

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[101] ESS, XII, p. 394.

Sherring says that caste system signified a project aiming 'neither more nor less than to exalt the Brahman, to feed his pride and to minister to his self-will' is to ignore so many factors which led to caste formation. Scholars have found many contributory factors like occupations,[102] race and colour,[103] the Aryan family institution and tradition, especially the marriage system[104] the natural tendency of following hereditary profession,[105] sacrificial organization,[106] idea of purity, taboo, mana[107] derived partly from the Aryan and partly from pre-Aryan inhabitants,[108] as responsible for the formation of caste system. [109] Brahmans manipulation[110] of their social superiority is more than obvious but Ghosh says that it is damning for human race to overlook the operation of historical and cultural forces.[111]

It is said that "Brahminism did not abolish caste in order to gain popular support, as it would have meant the surrender of the privileged position of the Brahmans without which there would have been no sense in preserving Brahmanism".[112] This explanation of the Brahmans championship of the varna system seems to over-simplify the problem. The Brahmans social role could hardly have been divorced from the support of the people and the society for whom they were laying down their laws.

[102] B.N. Saraswati, *Brahmanic Ritual Tradition,* Simila, 1977, p. 24.

[103] Majumdar, *Races and Culture of India,* 1962 (Translated by Ross from French, London, 1930, p. 301.

[104] Senart, *Caste in India*, London, 1930, p. 175.

[105] Ved. Ind., II. p. 6.

[106] Hocart, *Caste: A Comparative Study,* London, 1950, p. 17.

[107] Stanely Rice, " The Origin of Caste", Asiatic Review, XXV, 1929, pp. 14, 331; Bonnerjea, "Possible Origin of the Caste System in India", IA, LX, 1931, pp. 49-52, 67-70, 91-95.

[108] Basham, *The Wonder That was India*, London, 1954, p. 18.

[109] Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, Lahore, 1916, pp. 1-25.

[110] Macdonell, HSL, p. 184; Max Muller, HSL, pp. 11-12; 76-78; Weber, HIL, pp. 18-19.

[111] N.N. Ghosh, *Indo-Aryan Literature and Culture,* London, 1934, pp. 151-53.

[112] P. Thomas, *The Story of the Cultural Empire of India*, Ernakulam, 1959, p. 151.

of undesirable words to a Brahman: Manu says that "one who has said 'Hum' to a Brahman or has addressed him with 'Thou', shall have to bathe fast during the remaining part of the day and appease (the person offended) by a reverential salutation".

Spitting: For a crime like spitting on a superior the king shall cause both his lips to be cut off; if he urinates (on him) the penis, if he breaks wind (against him) the anus.

Sitting on an equal seat: If a man of the lowest birth (apakrstah) places himself on the exalted seat with a person of high caste (utkrstah), he shall be branded on his lip and banished, or the king shall cause his buttocks to be gashed.

Pretending: For pretending to be a Brahman, Manu provides death penalty to a Sudra.

***Theft*:** It is very significant to note that Manu prescribes for this offence, higher fine for men of upper castes than those of the lower castes. By death, a thief becomes pure. A Brahman may purify himself by austerities.

***No Corporal Punishment*:** A Brahman must not be punished bodily. According to Manu, if a twice-born desires to remove by austerities the guilt of stealing gold (of a Brahman), he shall prefer penance (prescribed) for a slayer of a Brahman (living) in a forest and has to be dressed in garments made of bark.

After the penance, he must give to a Brahman, learned in the Vedas, ten cows and a bull, and if he does not possess so much property he must offer to them all he has.

The Atharvaveda also contains numerous incantations which could ruin the king, if the priests were to recite them. Their services were also required by the king setting out for battles, because the royal priest prayed for his victory. All this implied still more powers and privileges for Brahmans. As a rule they were guaranteed freedom from bodily punishment.Their property could not be attached. The process of justice was made favourable to them in all respects.

It is rightly said that the Brahmans as "religious and moral legislators obeyed a natural inclination which is very powerful in the Hindu mind.[113] In their attempt to give royal protection to varna-dharma Brahmans wielded political supermacy, Max Weber states that the responsibility to protect and preserve varna system helped the Brahman to have monopolistic power.[114]

Assault on a Brahman

Manu, Narada and Brahaspati prescribe very harsh punishment for a Sudra who offends a person of the higher varna. If a Sudra mentions contemptuously even the name and the caste of a twice-born person, an iron nail ten finger long shall be thrusted into his mouth. And in case he insults a twice-born with gross invective, he shall have his tongue cut off, for he is of low origin. The king shall cause hot oil to be poured into his mouth and ears. The term twice-born (Dvijati) indicates only the Brahmans and the kshatriyas, this punishment is clearly forbidden in the case of a Sudra reviling a Vaisya.

Brahaspati considers pratilomas and the antyas (untouchables) as highly degraded persons. Jayaswal suggests that these rules were framed with a view to counter the Buddhist and Jain theory that a Sudra who preached dharma was entitled to equality with higher varnas.

Manu lays down a general rule that for offences of twice-born men against those of equal caste (varna), the fine shall be twelve panas; for speeches which ought not to be uttered, fine shall be double. For mutual abuse involving a Brahman and a Kshatriya, a mild fine must be imposed on the Kshatriya. In case a Sudra assaults a Brahman an exemplary punishment is prescribed by Manu.

A person who hurts or strikes a Brahman will get punishment not only here but also in the other world. Even in case of uttering

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[113] Senart, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[114] Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, New York, 1953, p. 404.

The Sutra-texts clearly lay down that the Brahman is superior to all by virtue of his very birth in a Brahman family. His other prerogative was to officiate as a priest at a sacrifice.

The Buddhist and Jaina texts, however, present a somewhat different picture. They show the Kshatriyas to be superior to the Brahmans although they reflect the generally respected position held by the Brahmans in the society. Both of these religious cults were against costly sacrifices such as animal slaughter. They strongly condemned all those who were connected with these cruel activities.

Kautilya wrote a manual of political statecraft rather than a smriti. He had to restrain his enthusiasm for Brahman superiority to practicable limits. Although he is aware of his admiration for the innate superiority of the Brahman, yet he does not find it possible to give them disproportionate advantage.

Having reached the pinnacle of their glory under the Guptas, they did not hesitate to proclaim that they were Bhodevas, gods on earth. In the social order, the supremacy of the Brahman was unquestioned. He was in the most privileged position. Among the mortals, there was none equal to him. Springing from the mouth of Brahma, he is by right, the lord of the whole creation. On account of his most excellent origin, he is entitled to everything in this world.

According to Patanjali even when a Brahman failed in his spiritual and religious duties appropriate to his varna, birth alone entitled him a place in his social group.[115] There were special rules for his betrothal, initiation and burial. The period of impurity prescribed for him was shortest.[116]

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[115] Tapashsrutabhyam yo hino jatibrahman eva sah Mahabhasya, V. I. 115, p. 363. L 15, cf. B.N. Puri, *India in the Times of Patanjali*, Bombay, 1957, p. 90.

[116] Manu., II. 36; III. 24, 35; V. 83, 92; Yaj. III. 22. In case of still birth, Brahaspati (Asauca, 34-35) reversing the normal gradation, prescribes 10, 7, 5, 3, days respectively for the Brahmans, Kshatriyas,Vaisyas and Sudras. cf. Upadhyay, *op. cit.*

Besides, he enjoyed other privileges of more material consequences. Killing of a Brahman was a moral sin. He was, under no circumstances to be executed. Banishments and fines were thought to be adequate punishments. For the payment of fines, he was granted a special treatment. If a Kshatriya or a Vaisya or a Sudra was unable to pay a fine he was to discharge the debt by labour. But a Brahman was to pay it by instalments as he earned it.

The rate of interest to be charged on debt was also graduated according to the order of the varnas. The Brahman had to pay the lowest rate. According to the Arthasastra, Brahmans were exempted from payment at erries, pickets, etc.

A Brahman's property was considered to be inviolable. It could not be confiscated even by the state. In case of failure of all heirs, the property of the member of three varnas passed into the hands of the state, and not to members of their respective varna. But in case of a Brahman's property, it was to be distributed among the fellow members of his varna.

The king, under no circumstances, was to levy taxes on the srotriyas. If a treasure was found by a Brahman he could keep the whole of it, if others found it the Brahman was to be given a share, sometimes as big as half. In order to complete a sacrifice, a Brahman could forcibly appropriate the property of others, especially that of the Vaisyas and Sudras. It is abundantly clear that the Brahmanical law-givers were keen on sanctifying life and property of the Brahmans. As regards the position of Brahmans in the society and a distinction has to be made between the normative and the actual representation of the Brahmans position. The difference may perhaps be better described by calling them intellectual by popular representation. The normative representation was not just idealistic and without any touch of reality. Although many deviated, yet quite a few did conform to the ideal.

It was, however, the popular attitude which really determined the class-structure of the society. Whatever received the popular approval, eventually got santified as a social custom and forced its way even to legal acceptance.[117] The attitude of the intellectuals to the caste, and especially to the station and duties of the Brahmans differed from the popular feeling. The intellectuals, however, had to make compromise with the popular concept on many points.

This is how the same texts contain contradictory attitudes to the question of rights and duties of this varna. The same texts contain intellectual and idealized concept of the Brahman, side by side with the more popular portrait of life. The popular concept of a Brahman which represented the broad reality of actual life was similar in Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain works.

Although the ideal Brahmanhood has been differently described by different authorities yet the differences are more superficial than real. The core is the same. The external differences were the accretions of different religious and phiosophical outlooks.

Deviations of Brahmans

The exclusive duties of the Brahmans, viz. teaching and conducting sacrifices for others were, obviously, not regular and sufficient means to grant them economic security. So the law-givers prescribed other means in addition to receiving of gifts. But the image and status of the Brahman were always kept in view.

The moral restrictions which permitted limited sources of subsistence were bound to make their practical living a little hard. They were compelled to deviate from their ideals even in normal times. The socio-political disturbances made the entire period an age of emergency. The social conditions were hardly favourable for the smooth observance of the orthodox precepts. Grave deviations from the prescribed duties by all the classes in general, and Brahmans in particular, threatened the very fabric of the orthodox society.

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[117] U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay, 1959, p. 311.

Besides the social deviations of the Brahman class as found in the Jataka stories and in the description of the Kali age, the Mahabharata makes a specific mention of some serious deviations which reduced them to a low status. It says that the Brahmans who are not well-born and do not follow the duties of their order, and are addicted to evil practices are like Sudras.[118] Those who are employed in the law courts for summoning the people, those who perform worship for others to gain money, those who perform the sacrifices of Vaisyas, and Sudras, those who make voyages on the ocean— these five are regarded as chandals among Brahmans.[119]

Those who ride horses or elephants or become foot-soldiers, become equal to Vaisyas.[120] Such violations of the standard varna-dharma must have been a problem to the contemporary law-givers. Curbing of such deviations, seems to be of paramount importance to them. In the Brahmanic efforts to standardize the class behaviour, mere assertion of the traditional social order was not enough, although it was the primary need of the time. They made certain provisions in accordance with traditional rules, either to curb deviations or, if necessary, to accord them legal sanction and support occupation digressions under abnormal situations.

In fact, the laws of emergency are essential for the smooth functioning of any social system. Talcott Parsons observes thus: 'there is evidence that every social system possesses more or less a well-developed 'secondary' defence against deviation from either or both of the immediate functions.' An account of these measures as adopted by the Brahmanic authors is given below.

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[118] Mbh., XII. 77.6

[119] *Ibid.*, XII. 77.8

[120] Parsons Talcott, *Essays in Sociological Theory*, 1963, p. 152.

King's Support

The law-givers lay down a set of special provisions exhorting the king to provide the learned Brahmans with subsistence.[121] They are entitled to seek their livelihood from the king.[122] It is said that drought and epidemic destroy the realm of a king in whose reign a srotriya dies of starvation.[123] And alternatively, a king attains heavenly bliss who bestows landed property upon the Brahman, Nay, he earns a greater reward in case he is slain in an attempt to rescue the lost property of a Brahman.[124]

The Theory of Apaddharma

The social division into classes by birth decided memberships, entailing special duties, privileges and status on the members of each class. It could not easily reconcile to the occupational variations of members of a particular class. Despite the familiar bond of hereditary occupation, social circumstances may not have always been helpful to an individual in following the parental vocation. Personal liking and aptitude also must have been a factor of considerable importance in this matter. But deviation would reduce an individual to a nominal membership of his class.

If this tendency was allowed to develop to a large proportion in periods of crisis, the Brahmans and the great risis fearing death in period of distress, do not scriptures as the alternatives. It seems that in order to harmonize the opposite pulls between birth-decided class-membership and deviation-bond actual vocation in practice, the social thinkers of our period devised the theory of 'apaddharma' which was a great asset to them in their task of social standardization.

[121] Manu, VII. 82, VII. 83.
[122] GDS, IX. 63.
[123] Manu, VII. 134.
[124] *Ibid.*, VII. 83-84.

Apaddharma: Provision for Personal Distress

A closer analysis of the apaddharma provisions shows that the special laxities in ideal means of subsistence and duty were granted in two sets of crisis, i.e. personal distress and cultural crisis. The provisions under personal distress seem to be concerned directly with an individual's own problems, created either by unfavourable social circumstances or by his own incapabilities or disabilities to earn livelihood by his normal vocation,[125] even in absence of any major crisis in society. The want of a standard means of subsistence is taken to have created personal distress.[126] Laxity is granted in case of any distress involving a danger to life.[127] Such a distress is also created by calamities like drought etc.

There is a pathetic description of dreadful conditions of famine in which risis would walk fireless and homeless without carrying for pure and impure food. A risi like Visvamitra had to demand food from a chandala.[128] Thus a major crisis may also create personal distress. In order to give this provision a traditional sanctity, Manu illustrates the instances of ancient risis, like Ajigarta Vamadeva, Bharadvaja and Visvamitra who, pressed by the danger of starvation, resorted to unhealthy means of subsistence without incurring any sin therefrom.[129] But the apaddharma provision was strictly meant for critical times and if it was resorted to or retained in normal times, the persons concerned would not gain merit in the next world.[130]

While allowing the Vaisyas means of liveihood, viz. agriculture, trade, etc.,to a Brahman and a Kshatriya, certain restrictions were imposed, in order to make these means

[125] Manu, X. 81 (a).
[126] *Ibid.*, X. 85.
[127] *Ibid.*, X. 104 (a).
[128] Mbh., XIII. 139. 25-27.
[129] Manu, X. 105-108.
[130] *Ibid.*, XI. 28.

compatible with the status of these two upper classes. Agriculture was regarded as the exclusive occupation of the Vaisyas. It was not considered to be consistent with the study of the Vedas. It was open to them in the Vedic times[131] but later on it was also allowed to the Brahmans, only when they could be engaged in it without impairing their Vedic studies. Otherwise, agriculture was to be given up.[132]

Manu's disapproval of agriculture is based on a different argument. He exhorts a Brahman or a Kshatriya to avoid it because injury to many sentient beings is involved in it and, further, it is dependent on others, i.e., labourers and oxen etc.[133] While the argument of Baudhayana is based on practical difficulties inherent in agriculture, Manu gives an idealistic explanation accepting the precept of non-violence which seems to be an influence of the Buddhist movement.

Likewise, trade, though allowed in distress, was not permitted in certain articles like cooked food, sesamum, stones, salt, cattle, dyed-cloth and cloth made of hem or fleshor wool, fruits, roots, medical herbs, water, weapons, meat, soma (liquor), perfumes of all kinds, milk, butter, oil, wax, sugar, bread, forest-birds, indigo, lac, iron and all beasts etc.[134] Some of these restrictions were not applicable to Kshatriyas.[135]

But sesamum is allowed for barter.[136] The authors further lay down that in case these articles are sold by a Brahman, he incurs the sin of Upapataka which requires prayascitta to absolve the sin.[137] Narada would have a Brahman resorting to the sale of forbidden article in normal times, punished by the king.[138]

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[131] RV, X. 34.13.

[132] BDS, I. 5.10.31; Manu, X. 83-84,cf. BDS, II. 2.82-83.

[133] Manu, X. 83; see also X. 84, cf. BDS,, II. 2.82-83.

[134] Manu, X. 81-89.

[135] GDS, VII. 15.

[136] Yaj., II. 39; Narada, I. 66, cf. Manu, X. 90.

[137] Manu, XI. 62.

[138] Narada, 1.67, cf. Manu, X. 117.

There must have been some traditional stigma of taboo attached to the articles like salt, oil, liquor, iron etc. which was responsible for the interdiction of their trade by the Brahmans. For instance, iron, originally secret technology even among the Hittities must have been held as containing some magical propensity. A belief visualizing evil forces in this metal subsequently identified it with Saturn.

What appears to be a significant point is that the concept of sin is utilized for prohibiting any encroachment of the Brahmans or Kshatriyas on the traditional challenges of the Vaisya class. It must have exerted a considerable influence to keep the class-structure stratified distinctly. In the same way Brahmans and Kshatriyas were discouraged from moneylending even in the time of distress Usury was not considered to be a suitable activity for them.

Gift

Gift was one of the spectacular means to procure merit in the kalyuga. Gifts from proper donors was a standard means of subsistence for the Brahmans. But in times of distress some laxity was allowed to meet the situation. A starving Brahman is permitted to accept gifts from any proper twice-born,[139] and, in case he fails to get sufficient gifts for his maintenance, he could accept the same from any one, even from a Sudra and Antyaja.

But this laxity was allowed only for subsistence and not for performance of religious acts. Sudra's help in sacrifice would make a Brahman chandala in the next birth. This conservative spirit of Manu is rendered mild by Yajnavalkya, as he allows acceptance of gift from all in order to meet the expenses of religious undertakings and clear the dues of the preceptor and servants.

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[139] Manu, IV. 34.

Most law-givers seem to be unanimous in permitting a distressed Brahman to accept gift from all men, excepting the mortal sinners, for feeding his parents and dependents and appeasing gods, for the completion of sacrifice and to meet the expense of marriage.[140] In this connection the dictum of Manu is strange. He lays down that for such purposes a wealthy Vaisya or Sudra, not performing his religious duties, is not be asked for a gift but his wealth is not to be appropriated by force or theft which does not amount to be a sinful act.[141]

At one time, the gift of land became an object of special praise at the hands of many authors. Yajnavalkya extolls the gift of land capable of yielding a crop or fruit. The gift of cows, land, and knowledge is held as superior.[142] Abysasan Parva (62.2) praises land grant as surpassing all other gifts. It is said that whatever sins a king commits in bringing the earth under his control, gift of cows in thousands, and that of land purifies him. Bestowing[143] Brahmans with gift of gold, cows and land secures deliverance even to the wicked.

The land grants to the Brahmans seems to be of an immense socio-cultural importance. It created a class of Brahman landlords and gave economic power to this section. By accelerating the cultivation of virgin land, it must have added vigour to the process of acculturation of the primitive people. The socialization of the values and norms of the orthodox culture specially in the colonized regions certainly made the people submissive to political power. The supreme duty of a king, according to Kautilya, was to establish his subject in their respective traditional occupations (svadharma) by the regulations of the state.

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[140] GDS, XVIII. 24.
[141] Manu, XI. 1. 127.
[142] *Ibid.*, IV. 233.
[143] Mbh., XIII. 59.5.

But it is also laid down that the propagating different branches of knowledge, the people should be led to cultivate disciple.[144] Through gifts of riches to proper persons, the kings should win over the affection of the people.[145] It is said in the Anusasana parva that peace prevails in the kingdom,[146] if Brahmans are pleased by various means of gifts. In fact, the land grants appear to be one of the most significant institutions reared with a purpose to pushing forward the neo-orthodox culture, having agriculture as its base.

The non-cannonical works of our period also speak highly of gifts to Brahmans. Since most of the works were composed by the Brahmans themselves, they might have given somewhat inflated importance to gifts bestowed upon them by kings and princes. Bhasa says that a king should bestow his whole wealth on the Brahman. Vatsyayana says that blessings of the Brahmans were a means to a long life and glory. It was a great desire of a lady to endow a gift of a thousand cows to a Brahman.[147]

Sacrificers used to bestow heavy riches upon the Brahmans at the end of sacrifices. Asvaghosa says that Buddha's father gave the full courtesy of rich gifts to the best of the twice-borns, wishing that his son might become lord of the earth, as prophesied, and that he should not retire to the forest before attaining old age.

In the Karnabharanataka, Bhasa mentions Karna's gifts of a thousand horses of the reputed Kamboja breed, of countless herds of elephants and golds of the vanquished earth. In the Mahavastu, it is said that twenty thousand Brahmans always eat at the king's table, day and night, and are honoured and esteemed. There is an epigraphic testimony to this point.[148]

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[144] KA, I. 7.

[145] Ibid., I. 7.1-2.

[146] Mbh., XIII. 136.11; see also *ibid.*BE. XIII. 151.11.

[147] Kamasutra, VI. 5.25.

[148] Upadhyay, *op.cit.*

Thus, we find that the theory of Apaddharma was a useful means to meet a situation of emergency in the society without endangering the standards of the varna system. It can be said that this theory provided a ready pretext to justify occupational digressions of the society disturbed by major and minor wars and troubles creating conditions. But the authors, at the same time, do not allow any misuse of the provisions. Besides, it is universally ordained that the performance of one's own dharma although half-done, is far better in giving merit than performing the others completely.[149] Further, one of the most important points of the Apaddharma theory was that a low caste individual was strictly prohibited to take up the vocation of higher castes. In case one resorted to it, the king was to deprive him of his wealth, banishing him immediately from the kingdom.

It is universally acknowledged, with minor exceptions of course that the Brahman had the superior most position in the social set-up. As Manu says, 'he was first born, and as he possesses the Veda, he is by right the lord of this whole creation.' Again the Brahmans were believed to have excelled all mankind in intelligence and wisdom. Besides penance, learning and birth make a man a Brahman. A Brahman came into existence and was born as the highest on earth, the lord of all created beings, for the protection of the treasure of the law. Thus, the pre-eminence of the Brahmans was established not only over other varnas but over all the created beings. Accordingly, the Brahmans were the link between men and gods. They were considered to be the incarnation of dharma on earth.

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[149] Manu, X. 97, cf. Gita, XIII. 45-48.

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Political Role of Brahmans

Brahmanism as a political concept in ancient India postulates a theory of the role of Brahmans in the state. It implies the extent, significance and importance of their participation in the activities of the state. But the nature of their political role can be viewed within the socio-religious framework of the Hindus. There is a deeper philosophy involved in theorizing about the political infrastructure and the intellectual forces guiding political activity.

In the ancient Hindu works on political thought, political matters are treated as a part of human activities which are intrinsically connected with the problems of human destiny and moral and spiritual values. Ancient Hindu writers discuss problems of political and administration as interlinked with the intimate problems of human origins and cosmic processes. The problems of foundation and justification of political action and its meaning in the context of social structure are more significant than the definition of citizenship. The positivistic approach to law or growth of the state as a public service corporation.

The writers of ancient Hindu political thought have generally a philosophical or religious approach to politics. But with the growth of arthasastra literature, an intensive and realistic discussion of the problems of diplomacy and administration had started even though some of the dominant religious and philosophical conceptions continued to influence the works belonging to the arthasastra tradition. The Vedas are the earliest and the most important works in Hindu thought. Primarily they are hymns of prayer to gods. They also give us an idea of the society, polity and economic conditions of the times. So far as political philosophy is concerned the Vedas provide us with notions of Brahmana[1] and Kshatra[2]. The Brahmanas represent the Brahman caste as symbolizing the Brahma power and the Kshatriya caste, the Kshatra power.

But this caste-wise representation was not supposed to be rigid.[3] Kshatriya caste never attained the exalted height which the concept of Brahma attained when it came to signify the absolute. Perhaps this tendency gives evidence of the predominant spiritual character of Hindu thought. The Satapatha Brahman says that although Kshatra and Brahma are interdependent, the Brahman who represents the Brahma can do without Kshatra but not vice versa.[4] According to the Aitareya Brahman, in the course of the Punarabhiseka ceremony, the king descends from the throne and makes obeisance to the Brahman and says verily thus the kingly power (Kshatra) falls under the influence of the holy power that kingdom is prosperous, rich in heroes, in it a hero is born. These notions of the Brahman and Kshatra are one of the basic contributions of the Vedas and the Brahmanas to Hindu thought.

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[1] According to Martin Haug, Brahma signifies prayer. Rudolf Roth holds that originally Brahma meant the volitional energy directed towards the gods, then it meant a religious word and finally indicated the absolute. According to Max Muller, *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, p. 68, Brahma denotes what grows, from which means to grow. Deussen, lgemeine Geschichte der Philosophic, I.i.305 interprets the word Brahma to mean the human will in its striving to the absolute, when the aspirant in prayer returns to his self which transcends space and time. For the sake of simplicity, I have used the form Brahma and not the form Brahman. For the same reason I have used the form Karma and not Karman.

[2] "Kshatra, in the general sense of dominion rule, power as exercised by gods and men, occurs frequently from the Rgveda onwards. The word is also found in the concrete sense of 'rulers' in the Rgveda and later, but in no case does it in the Rgveda certainly mean what it regularly denotes in the later Samhitas, the ruling class as opposed to the priests, the subject people and the servile class. A Kshatra-pati is several times mentioned as equivalent of king". Ved. Ind., I. 202.

[3] SBr., XIII. 1.5. RV, IV. 12.3.42; V. 69. I, in these hymns the word Kshatriya is exclusively connected with royal authority or divine authority cf. Ved. Ind., I. 203.

[4] SBr., IV. 1.4.6.

The period following the Samhita age[5] is usually called the age of the Brahmans. In the period from about 10th century B.C. to the 7th century B.C., three great Brahmanas provide political information (a) the Satapatha, (b) the Aitareya, and (c) the Taittiriya. Mahabharata and Ramayana also provide data but from a theoretical and theological standpoint. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are post-Maurayan, and for details of political history they refer to periods contemporary with the later Vedic age. The two dominant tendencies of this period - from the age of the Brahmanas to the beginnings of Magadhan imperialism in the 6th century B.C. - are first, the consolidation of strong monarchical power parallelled with the decline of the Samiti and the Sabha and secondly, the rise of republican form of governments which attained their maturity in the succeeding 5th and 4th centuries B.C.

A study of Vedic and classical Sanskrit literature and political sources reveal the position and role of Brahmans in the Vedic age, the pre-Mauryan, the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods when Brahmanic renaissance attained the highly respectable social position. In political affairs, practically nothing was possible without the advice of the counsellors who used to be largely Brahmans.

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[5] Referring to some of the dominant economic characteristics of this period N.C. Bandyopadhyaya, *Economic Life and Progress in Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1925), pp. 107-9 says: "As yet there is nothing to prove that in the Vedic period the king was regarded as the owner of the state territory. The Rgvedic evidence shows that as guardian of his people he could claim his tribute only from his subjects. Nothing more is said of his being the owner of the soil. Later on in the Atharvaveda we find prayers for the grant of a share in villages to the king, and this who that he was not regarded as the sole owner of the villages. As regards aristocracy we have nothing in the Rgveda which proves the existence of such an aristocracy. The Chandogya Upanisad contains the gift of the village by king Janasruti to Raikva. In subsequent periods just gifts of villages were common and this contributed to the growth of the Mahasalas whom we find in the Upanisads."

The appointment of the royal purohita was considered to be one of the most important functions of the king. Though Manu speaks only about the religious functions of the purohita, the performance of king's domestic rites and sacrifices, the office was surely not devoid of political power. That Yajnavalkya makes a thorough knowledge of the theory of punishment (dandaniti) an essential qualification for the office speaks for itself.[6]

The arthasastra is very clear on the point. It asks the king to follow the purohita as a 'pupil does his teacher, a son his father or a servant his master'. Even though the purohita was perhaps not a member of the state council, his very special kind of personal relationship with the king was sure to give his office great political power and influence. In the council of ministers, the Brahmans seemed to have a substantial representation though neither Kautilya nor Manu nor Yajnavalkya specify the varna of the persons to be appointed ministers - they emphasize only noble birth and other statesmen like qualities. There little doubt that suitable persons from all ranks were appointed ministers. But Manu accords a Brahman the most important place among the ministers like the prime minister, though Manu does not give him such a designation.

The king as the executive wields force (danda) to uphold and enforce the cannons of dharma, which formed the basic structure of the norms to be applied to day-to-day life. These scriptures and legendary sources treat dharma as the real sovereign of the state. The Upanisads elaborated the notion of dharma: Brahman was not strong enough. So he created still further the most excellent dharma. Dharma is the force of forces or power of powers. There is nothing higher than dharma. Henceforth even a weak man rules a strong person with the help of dharma, as with the help of a king. This dharma is (equivalent to) truth. Hence, if a man speaks the truth they say he speaks dharma and if he speaks dharma they say he speaks the truth.[7]

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[6] Yaj., I. 313, cf. Govind Prasad Upadhyay, *Brahmanas in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1979).

[7] Br. Up., I. 4.14. According to Brihadaranyaka IV. 4.5, the Atman is regarded as the essence of everything of dharma and adharma.

This passage has remarkable and an unusual influence on Hindu political thought and practice. Like the Satapatha, it equates dharma with truth. Secondly, the passage is emphatic in its enunciation of the supremacy of dharma over mere physical or military strength i.e., Kshatra. According to the Brahmanas, its an integral force in the political and social structure.

In early Buddhism, dharma had metaphysical and moral meaning. The Buddhist theory of dharma had very important political results. Kautilya accepted the view of the Brahmanas and the Upanisads that dharma is rooted in truth. Kautilya uses the term dharma in the sense of law and more specifically civil law. In this sense he does not use the word dharma alone but uses "rooted in dharma".[8]

According to Sukra also, one of the implications of dharma is law. He prescribes that the Pandita should suggest changes in dharma. He says, the Pandita has to study and examine the rules of dharma existent both in ancient days and in the contemporaneous society, which have been mentioned in the codes, which are now opposed, and which militate against the customs of the folk and to advise the king with those which are fruitful both for this life and beyond. Sukra is an advocate not of immutable and eternal norms but is a sociological realist and can visualize the necessity and possibility of legal change.[9]

According to Manusmriti, the Brahman because of his birth from the mouth of the Lord is by right the master of the whole creation. The Brahman is declared to be the most excellent of all men. The gods consume the sacrificial offering through the mouth of the Brahman. The very birth of a Brahman is an eternal incarnation of the sacred law for he is born to fulfil the sacred law and becomes one with God. The Brahman is there for the protection of the treasury of the law.[10]

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[8] KA, III.

[9] This, indeed, is the theme of the Sukraniti.

[10] Manusmriti, referred to elsewhere.

Royal Patronage

It is obvious that Brahman thinkers and law-givers envisaged a hierarchical set-up in which the varna-ashrama-dharma had to be implemented and duly protected. The Sruti was accepted as the fountain-head of sacred laws which were binding on kings, ministers, judges and all others. The state was only a part of society and the king, although believed to be drawing his power from god, was bound by the sanctity of traditional laws. He was the upholder of dharma and the harbinger of the general weal of the people. The establishment of the traditional laws and policies was mixed with the patronage to orthodoxy and the Brahmans.

When the king was overburdened with administrative work and with the sacrificial rituals having become complex, the need for a person who was able to devote his full time to the sacrifical rituals was felt. Thus, priesthood was separated from kingship. In due course and with the growth of administrative responsibility, the king gradually was going away from ritualism and the science of rituals came to the priest. According to Max Weber, this was the time when "the magician had invaded the precincts of the ancient priestly order and rinally taken over its legacy".[11]

According to some historians, the institution of priesthood goes back to Indo-European times and can be traced to countries like Iran, Greece and Germany, where Indo-European people settled after migration. However, Pargiter and Kosambi are of the opinion that priests in large numbers were recruited by the Aryan invaders from the conquered aborigines. 'Brahmanism' says Pargiter, was originally not Aila or Aryan institution. Since the earlier Brahmans were connected with non-Aryan people and settled among them at a time when alias entered.

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[11] Max Weber, *Religion of India* (New York, 1958).

The Brahmans, as stated in the Mahabharata were priests to demons and the demons themselves were priests. The chief of the gods incurred the most heinous sin by killing demons, something so grotesque or blasphemous to orthodox, to be found elsewhere in Brahmanical literatures. Indra is often referred to in the hymns and the Epics as the slayer of vrtra, a Brahman. Pargiter believes that the similarity between the non-Aryan and Aryan names is due to their Sanskritization or their translation into Sanskrit equivalents. Priesthood development this way was considered as a pre-Aryan institution.[12]

Though there is nothing to authenticate theory, it is possible that some of the pre-Aryan priests might have found their way into the social fold. The Brahman priest was an Indo-European institution, or that the priestly class of the Aryan conquerors may have been largely recruited from among the conquered.

The honoured position which priests got in society was also due to their possession of occult faculties. The original Brahmans were not necessarily priests but were adept in matters, supernatural, magic, religion, wizardry and medicine. Max Weber suggests that the Brahmans originally were magicians developed into a hierocratic caste of cultured men. Mcdonell is of the view that long before the Rgveda, the magician had turned into a priest, and holds that even in the earliest period, the sacrificial priests was also a magician. Even the highest intellects among the priests regarded prayers and sacrifices as one of the means of securing others' welfare, along with magic, which was not just an effective and reprehensible superstition.

However, such doctrines seem untenable because the Rgvedic sacrifice was not magical in character. Deshmukh points out that since magic never prevailed among the early Indo-Europeans at any rate, the rise of religion in the form of belief and worship of heavenly gods, it is likely that no separate class of hereditary magicians existed. The study of the Rgveda reveals that the sages might have possessed the knowledge of the sorcery but this was not the most important part of their knowledge. The full development of sorcery can be seen in the hymns of Atharvaveda, where it was considered as the legitimate weapon of a Brahman to guard himself against the attacks from others and also to harm the oppressors.

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[12] F.E.Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London, 1922).

If we accept the view that the early Brahmans came from outside India and of Aryan stock, they must have been white in complexion. In India they had to contend with a people who had been dark in colour. As the theory goes, after having vanquished the natives, the Aryans allowed assimilation, mainly through intermarriages. As a result, we come across references to dark-skinned priests, e.g., in the Rgveda certain sages of black complexion have been mentioned.

The Brahman as A Priest

Ever since the Vedic period, the Brahman priests were intimately associated with kingship. The evolution of ancient Hindu polity has a deep stamp of the priestly class. A number of elaborate sacrifices and ceremonies speak of the close relation of the sacerdotal class with the institution of monarchy. The royal priests, though entrusted mainly with sacerdotal functions for the king, generally exerted a great influence on secular matters also.[13] The Brahmanical works unanimously exhort that the king appoints a priest and assigns him an important position in the body politic. Vasistha ordains the appointment of a priest for discharging rites of a domestic nature. He cites a Vedic passage (as his XIX 4) that a realm, where a Brahman is appointed as a domestic priest, prospers. The Brahman acted both as an astrologer and sacrificial priest. He had to perform the rites connected with 'expiation (Santi) festivals, a prosperous march, long life, and auspiciousness for the king; as well as those that were intended to cause enmity, to subdue (enemies), to destroy (them) by incantations, and to cause their misfortunes'. The priest not only worked as the domestic sacrificial agent to the king but also was entrusted with the general welfare and prosperity of the kingdom.

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[13] Vied Ved. Ind. I. 113-14; II. 90.

This clearly implies that the term used in public functions, i.e., 'Brahmapurohita' was identical to that of the Aitareya Brahmanas[14], term used for the royal priest. This apart, he performed other functions like rtvija, adharyu, hotr. Hotr and potr were associated with royal sacrifices. Only the Brahman-priest, who possessed distinct Brahmanic qualities, was to be the royal chaplain. Gautama recognized the magical power of the priest to be employed through the ritual acts.

The functions of the priest were quite wide and important. Baudhayana says, let the king choose a domestic priest who shall be foremost in all transactions. Kautilya states, 'He whose family and character were highly spoken of, who is well-educated in the Vedas and the six Angas, is skilful in reading portents, providential or accidental, is well-versed in the science of government, and who is obedient and who can prevent calamities ... by performing such expiatory rites as are prescribed in the Atharvaveda, the king shall employ him as high priest.'[15] It is further enjoined upon him that as a student follows his teacher, a son his father, and a servant his master, the king shall follow Brahman. Kautilya ordains the priest to religiously boost up the morale of the army to fight.[16] He is to accompany the king when he examines the persons who are to be appointed as ministers.[17]

The dicta of Kautilya reflects the position of the priest in the state as existed in the Vedic times. The priest used to support the king in war and together with the king, he was the protective force for the realm. In a hymn connected with the victory of Sudras, it is said: "May we in sacrifice conquer scornful Puru".[18] The priest is described as the protector of the realm (rastragopa).[19] In Winternitz's opinion, Kautilya accepts that the Brahmanical religion was the foundation of the state, and in his ideal state the Brahman plays the first role.[20] U.N. Ghoshal contends that the Purohita of Kautilya's Arthasastra has been ruled out from the list of proximate factors of government.[21]

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[14] Keith, HOS, 25, p. 313.

[15] KA, I. 9, tr. Shamasastry, 1919, p. 15.

[16] *Ibid.*, X.3.

[17] *Ibid.*, I. 10.1.

It is likely that the disappearance of smaller states of earliest times, giving place to bigger kingdoms, led to the development of various administrative departments by the time of Kautilya. It began to clearly differentiate the functions of the ministers from the purohita's and reduced the latter's influence in secular matters.

Likewise, Manu differentiates the functions of the domestic priest from the secular responsibilities of the Brahman ministers. In a developed science of polity such functional differentiation was bound to adversely affect priestly influence.[22] Nonetheless, Kautilya emphasizes the status of the royal priest and gives him an important position in the state.

Yajnavalkya, in accord with Kautilya spirit, lays down that the king should administer the kingdom in due consultation with the Brahman priest.[23] Gautama says that the king who discharges religious duties with the assistance of a priest, prospers and never falls in distress.

The Brahman aspirants for this office were required to have sound learning, pure descent, good looks, suitable age, moral attributes and the capacity to protect the good and restrain evil.[24]

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[18] AV, III. 19. 1. cf. RV, VII. 18.13.

[19] ABr., VIII. 25.

[20] Geschischte der Indischen Literatur, III, p. 528 vide Sir Asutosh Memorial Volume, Patna, p. 34.

[21] U.N. Ghoshal, *Hindu Political Theories*, pp. 88-89.

[22] Vide Dikshitar, *Hindu Administrative Institution* (Madras, 1929), pp. 123-29 cf. Kangle, *Kautilya Arthasastra*, p. 145.

[23] Yaj., I. 312, cf. BDS, I. 10.18.8.

[24] Mbh., XII. 74.

The priest was to perform the Brahaspatisva sacrifice to qualify for this office. Yajnavalkya requires the priest to be an astrologer, well-versed in the theory of punishment and the Arharvan-Angiras formula. It implies that the priest had also to discharge some judicial functions. Hopkins observes that "we meet the former (the Brahman) not only as a religious but also as a judicial power".[25] Some of the royal priests like Patanjali were noted scholars also. Patanjali the great commentator on Panini was the royal chaplain of Pusyamitra Sunga. The priest also acted as a spiritual adviser to the king and served as a counsellor in general.[26]

In the Vedic period the role of this class was an active force. Apparently, the priestly class seems to be safeguarding its civil rights in the early period. But by the time of the Brahmana literature, it claimed enormous privileges and superior status. The Brahmanas established their hold on society through the office of the Purohita,[27] particularly in the pre-Upanisadic times.

The priests ever since the later Vedic period were undisputably identified with the Brahman class,[28] but the sacerdotal section of the Brahman was distinct from those who followed the Nivrtti dhayma of the ascetic trend. A typical Vedic priest, hankering after wealth, pleasure, and affluence is not compatible with the Brahman of Smriti ideals, who, though poor, were ethically a model for the society. This dichotomy of the Brahman class does not indicate any internal tension within the class; rather, the two sections were complementary to each other's position in the society.

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[25] Hopkins, Mutual relations of the four castes according to the Manava dharma castram, 1881, p. 91.

[26] Macdonell, HSL, p. 159.

[27] Kaegi, *The Rgveda*, p. 17.

[28] Beni Prasad, *The State in Ancient India*, pp. 29, 53-54.

Limitations of the Purohita's Power

One of the factors which limited the accentuation of the priests in the state was the uncertainty of the tenure of his office. This was a great problem ever since the Vedic period. As a consequence, the priests were tempted to make this office hereditary.[29] Whether they were always successful in their efforts is not the main problem here. Kings, like Ashoka, abolished the priest's office altogether. The royal chaplain was just a counsellor and domestic priest to the King. Despite all the superiority of his ritual status, he was subservient to king Ashoka. Also in a full-fledged monarchy of Kautilyan type, the priest was at par with other ministers and drew a regular salary. This was inconsistent with the efforts of the Brahman priests to remain independent of the state control. Manu groups the kings, the Purohitas and the Kshatriyas to be equal in rank but places them in low keys in relation to ascetics, vipras and the risis.[30] In the Mahabharata also, the royal priests are described to be of lower status than that of the risis, the officiating priests, and the learned Brahman teachers.[31] At times the priests were held even lower in status to king and in that case they invented stories of their usefulness, superiority and power.[32] The heterodox challenge affected this institution, exposing the worth of ritualism and the priestly greed. Purohita's counsel, in secular matters, was lessened and this privilege was not enjoyed by non-priestly Brahman ministers, even according to the Manusmriti.

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[29] Oldenberg, *Religion des Veda,* p. 376, cf. KA, I. 9-10.

[30] Manu, XII. 46, 48-49.

[31] Mbh., BE. XIII. 93.130, cf. Muir, OST, I, p. 128; critical edition, XIII. 95.65.

[32] Hopkins, JAOS, XIII, 1889, pp. 158-59, 162.

The process of standardization of social order asserted the priestly claims of privilege and position, but did not place him at par with an ideal Brahman. Thus the position of the Purohita went down in comparison to that in the later Vedic period. Whereas the Brahmans, who lived up to their high spiritual ideals, acquired a great status.

While taking into account the status of the royal chaplain or the Purohita serving the nobility, we should not forget that the sacerdotal section of the Brahmans was by far the most important. The spiritual aspect was the dominant factor in deciding the class status. It was this class which preserved and developed Srauta sacrifices and Grhya rites. In any case, the role of the Purohita was of considerable significance. As a matter of fact, the royal priests represented the Brahmans in general, and sacerdotal section in particular in the state. Although reduced in power, yet they could exercise a considerable influence on the king as a conservative force, especially when backed by the orthodox circles.

In fact, the prominent role played by the Brahmans has continued ever since. Through all ages, they have been respected as the intellectual leaders of the Hindu society. In course of time, the values associated with Brahmanism declined. As a result, we are left with Brahmans many of whom are hardly intellectuals.

In order to trace the role of Brahmans in the period following the break-up of the Mauryan Empire, it is necessary to take into account the theory of Brahmanic reaction, alternatively forwarded and rejected by scholars with equal conviction and force. Hara Prasad Shastri holds that the Brahmanic reaction sapped the foundation of Mauryan Empire. This theory has been seriously questioned. There are many other reasons responsible for its dismemberment. It calls for a re-examination of the validity of arguments for and against this theory.

Raychaudhuri holds that the appointment of the Dharmamahamatras by Asoka 'was not a direct invasion of the right and privileges of the Brahmans' because they were not only the superintendents of morals but were also employed to establish law and piety, which included liberality to Brahmans and promotion of the welfare of all the people, including Brahmans. He further argues that "there is nothing to show that the Dharmamahamatras were wholly recruited from non-Brahmans.[33]

But the problem before the Brahmans, especially of the intellectuals and those of the orthodox circles, was not so much of being benefited by liberality and the welfare programmes but was to face the challenge of Buddhism which was becoming increasingly dominant in the state and at the popular level to the detriment of Vedic orthodox culture.

The foremost duty of the Dharmamahamatras was to implement fully the laws of dharma or piety proclaimed by the emperor. The very idea of preaching the establishment of dharma, propounded by a king among the people, not to speak of the Brahmans, would have been an act causing resentment in the conservative section of the Brahmans, especially when it was promulgated by a king who, though tolerant, had obviously associated himself with a rival faith.

Most of the post-Asokan Maurya kings could not maintain cordial relations with the Brahmanic orthodoxy and the utter discontent of the Brahmans against the Mauryas is evidenced in the Yuga Purana of the Gargi Samhita, wherein the basis of their resentment seems to be the general loss of social and religious traditions of the Vedic fold.

Sastri's sweeping statement that the reaction promoted by the Brahmans had sapped the foundations of the Mauryan authority and dismembered the empire, ignores other historical factors. The causes of the downfall of the Mauryas were many,[34] and the Brahmanic reaction was only one of them. Similarly, there was the reaction of the Brahmans against the heterodox challenge and the dominance of Buddhism. A sort of tension between orthodox Vedism and Heterodoxy existed since long before the Mauryas.

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[33] Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1938), pp. 357-58.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 362-66.

The amicable relations of the Buddhists with the foreigners are contrasted with the deep reaction of orthodox Brahmans against them. It is said: 'there will be Yavanas here by reason of religious feelings or ambition or plunder; they will not be beings solemnly anointed but will follow evil customs by reason of the corruptions of the age. Massacring women and children and killing one another, the (Yavana) kings will enjoy the earth at the end of the kali age.'[35]

The orthodox Brahmans reacted strongly against foreigners and condemned them as Mlecchas. A culture antagonism was at the root of this tension and opposition. The hostile relation between the Brahmanical orthodoxy and the foreign invaders, especially the Greeks and Sakas, as depicted in the Yuga Purana and other literature, perhaps referred to the phenomenon of antagonism shown by these outlandish people against the Brahmanical socio-cultural system in the initial stages of their incursions. Before the process of their actual assimilation in the neo-orthodoxy started, this antagonism might have existed between them.

But the frenzy of foreign rulers and perpetration of oppression by them on the Brahmans were of their own invitation. An intense aversion expressed by them against foreigners let loose the latter's wrath on them. Brahmans championed the orthodox cause, rather militantly called them Mlecchas and preached their social boycott.

Going back to the time of Alexander's invasion, the observations of Greek authors about Brahmans confirm this view. Arrian informs us that Alexander himself led his army against the city of the Brahmans (Brachmanio) in which 5000 of them were killed and a few were taken prisoners.[36] They are particularly spotted to have instigated revolt against Alexander who put to death all such Brahmans.[37] All the prisoners together with the Brahmans who had instigated revolt were ordered to be taken to their own country and were hanged there.[38] Curtius and Diodorus support the account of Arrian.[39]

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[35] Pargiter, DKA, pp. 56, 74.

[36] McCrindle, *Invasion of India by Alexander the Great*, 1892, p. 142.

Plutarch viewed Brahmans as "philosophers (who) gave him no less trouble than the mercenaries, because they reviled the princes and encouraged the free states to revolt against him". For this, he hanged many.[40] According to Justin, Brahmans blamed the conduct of kalanos who in violation of the duties of his caste, went to live with the Macedonians.[41] It is plain that the Brahmans did not recognize the authority of Alexander and questioned his greatness. Justin mentions[42] that they asked, 'how could Alexander be the master of all the world when he has not yet gone beyond the river Tiberoboam'.[43]

Likewise in our period the orthodox Brahmans could not reconcile to the alien culture and condemned its harbingers as Mlecchas, which was bound to provoke the fury of the latter. In fact, it was difficult for the orthodox intellectuals to reconcile with the Mlecchas without the prior adjustment of the orthodox social system to their position.

The barriers of varna system, together with the non-missionary character of orthodoxy, at least in theory, obstructed the Brahmans in establishing amicable relations with the foreigners. On the contrary, the Buddhists were successful in winning them over to their fold. But the championship of Buddhists by foreigners was all the more annoying to Brahmans. The law-givers failed to adjust the social system and were unable to admit the foreigners to the varna system.[44] As regards religious matters, the difficult problem of admitting them to Vedic ceremonalism was solved by the carefully evolved neo-orthodoxy of a popular character which was open to all.

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[37] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

[38] *Ibid.*, p.160.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 306.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Cunningham identifies this river with the modern Tabranala, a small affluent of the Haro, which bends its course to the Indus and falls in it twelve miles below Attock.

Conflict Between Spiritual and Temporal Powers

The position of the Brahman class in relation to the rajanya class and the rulers was both ambiguous and precarious. As the latter threatened the position of the former, the unjust current of tussle between the spiritual and the temporal power for the priestly office and for social precedence had been an important feature of ancient society for a long time. The tradition of this conflict is carried on in the later literature.[45]

The instances of atrocities committed on the Brahmans by the kings in Pururvas, Nahusa and Nimi gives an idea of the situation in which Brahmans exerted to safeguard their interest and establish their superiority. The celebrated contest for the priestly office between Vasistha and Visvamitra also gives evidence to the same effect.[46] In a number of passages they are described as protesting against the harsh treatment of the nobility and threatening the nobles to restore back their wives and cows robbed from them. They claimed special rights for their women and cows. Thus the Brahmans tried to secure protection, immunities and civil rights.

The traditional development fuses the Brahman and the Kshatriya castes into an inseparable bond of mutual cooperation. Even in the early stages of the Vedic society, the Brahman priests and the Kshatriyas, loosely distinct on occupational basis, emerged as the Brahma and Kshatra powers,[47] cooperating actively in the cultural tussel[48] with non-Aryan elements, divided sharply and symbolically by the varna[49] (colour) factor. The priestly class was associated with the Vedic state, whether republican[50] or monarchical.[51] But as the time rolled on, the priests became champions of monarchical polity.

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[44] S.C. Bhattacharya, *Some Aspects of Indian Society* (Calcutta, 1978).

[45] Mbh., XII.

[46] RV, VII. 33.1; SBr., I. 5; vide Muir, *op.cit.*, p. 317; Manu, VIII. 110 cf. Upadhyay, *op. cit.*

In ancient times, ritual ceremonialism had vital functions in various walks of public life, which raised the priestly class to a distinct position in the society. Magical powers, deployed through the vehicle of ritual ceremonalism, were believed to control divine elements and leading in the chanting of mysterious mantra were meant to make the people strong and nobility weak, and vice-versa.[52]

The Purohita's power of lustre (samana)[53] could multiply the people. The priest through the agency of rituals in the coronation ceremony would raise the king above tribal control, making him supreme. Thus a king, when crowned, meant that " a Kshatriya was produced as a lord of all beings, the defender of Brahmans and of dharma".[54] A king consecrated by the Purohita with the Mahabiseka of Indra was believed to have established his way round the earth on every side.[55] The evolution of sacerdotalism generally marked the development of monarchical polity. The dynamic function of the symbolic forms as instituted in the consecration ceremonies and the various sacrifices like Asvamedha, Rajasuya, Vajapeya, etc., seems to be responsible for it.[56] Even the imperial status was categorized on the basis of rituals.[57]

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[47] RV, III. 53.12; I. 157.2

[48] *Ibid.*, I. 51.8; I. 17.21; III. 29.9.

[49] *Ibid.*, II. 12.4; I. 179.6.

[50] Pandey, IHC, Proceedings, 1952, p. 72.

[51] Jayaswal, HP, 1934. second edition, p. 189.

[52] Gluckman, ed., *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, (Manchester University Press, 1962), pp. 17, 30-33, 74-78, 83, 86.

[53] The Samana element has been common to the priesthood of other cultures.

[54] ABr., VIII. 12.

[55] *Ibid.*, VIII. 21-23.

The kings, through the help of the priestly class, were able to gain enormous powers freeing themselves of tribal control especially in times of military expediency. The active cooperation of the Brahma and Kshatra powers is highly emphasized in such times, for lack of which even the gods were defeated by the Asuras. It was said that a rajanya with a Brahman's support is superior to a rajanya without the help of the same. It is said that these two are the upholders of the sacred law among men.[59]

Since the king was to protect the varna-ashrama-dharma and the people against various challenging forces including those of heterodoxy, he was accorded an uncommon status – a superhuman or divine,[60] so that his words and actions may be religiously honoured by the people. The Kshatra power was no less important than the Brahman power, the former was also to acquire divine status like the latter. Kautilya would make the royal spy inflicter of punishment and bestower of reward.

Hence, the king's personality incorporates the eternal elements of deities like - Agni, Vayu, Surya, Kubera and Varuna. Even an infant king must not be deposed as he is a great deity in human form.[61] It is said that the king Prithu is declared by the Sruti to be the eighth incarnation of Visnu.[62]

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[56] A.S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India* (Banaras, 1949), pp. 25, 57-58.

[57] ABr., VIII. 15.

[58] ABr., I. 14.

[59] SBr., V. 4.4.5; see also SBE, XLI, p. 106.

[60] Ghoshal, AHIPI, 1959, pp. 24-25.

[61] Manu, VII. 8.

[62] Mbh., BE. XII. 59. 112.

The divinity of the king was not a theoretical proposition alone. The Kusana kings were styled as devaputras. In the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, Samudragupta is described to have the potentiality of the Likapalas and he is said to be possessed of the attributes of Visnu incarnate. Thus the polity of the Vedic orthodox tradition ascribes divine status to the king, unlike the Buddhist Cakkavatti Dhammika Dhammaraja who, though established the rule of dharma in all the four quarters, did not have the divine element in his person, nor was he a deity in human form.

Asoka, who approximated the Buddhist conception of kingship, was only a "Beloved of Gods". The divine king used to take a solemn pledge at his coronation to preserve the Vedic religion.[63] He was the protector of the Brahmans[64] and was entrusted to preserve and establish the varna-ashrama-dharma in the society.[65] Yajnavalkya entrusts him with a greater responsibility, viz., to establish the Svadharmas of the various societies, e.g., of the families (Kula), castes (Jati), guilds (Sreni), corporations (Gana) and of particular regions forms (Janapada). Even the Brahmans had to take up arms if the king so required.[66]

The varna duties are, at times, explained to have originated from the political order (rajdharma). By certain provisions human power, government, and punishment become sacramental phenomena, that is, channels by which divine forces are made to impinge upon the lives of men.[67] In fact, the formulation of such provision gives religious ideologies a solid political base to stand upon and, in turn, the operational range of political power is tremendously widened. No socio-religious sanction could prevent a Sudra to practise penance and Rama had to kill one (Sambuka)[68] in order to preserve Brahman's life and identity.

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[63] Mbh., XII. 59.112.

[64] Manu, VII. 35, 83, 133-34.

[65] GDS, XI. 9-10; Manu, VII. 35.

[66] Mbh., IX. 64.39; see R.N. Sharma, *Brahmins Through the Ages* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 125-26.

[67] Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, p. 34.

[68] N.K. Bose, *The Structure of Hindu Society*, p. 88.

An assertion of the independent status of Brahmans is made in the Manusmriti also. Whatever wealth exists on the earth belongs to the Brahman; the Brahman deserves everything on account of his superiority due to his descent (from the mouth of the Creator).[69] The Brahman eats but his own food, wears but his own apparel, bestows but his own in alms; other mortals subsist through the benevolence of the Brahman.[70] Gautama also laid down the traditional claim saying that the king is master of all, with the exception of the Brahman.[71]

This at first sight might appear to be an extravagant claim but it is consistent with the spirit of militant assertion of their supreme status. It reminds us of the Brahmans early attempts to remain independent of royal power. This claim was sought to be materialized by elevating the Brahman's spiritual power.

On the other hand, despite the priestly attempts at the consolidation of the Purohita office by making it hereditary,[72] the priests were not free of the king's autocratic treatment who could appoint more than one Purohita and dismiss them at will.[73] As a matter of fact, the greatest priestly weapons against the Kshatra power was speech and the power derived from the sacred Atharvan and Angiras texts.[74] When a Brahman priest could serve more than one king at a time, the king could naturally appoint more than one priest.

Later on the Brahmanic claim to independence from the royal power on the basis of their supreme ritual status, was challenged by the pointed attacks of heterodoxy against the cult of sacrifice, rituals, and priestly pretensions. The end of the office of royal chaplain in the time of Asoka amounted to a final blow to the time-honoured priestly position.

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[69] Manu, I. 100.
[70] *Ibid.*, I. 101.
[71] GDS, XI. 1, cf. XI. 7-8.
[72] RV, X. 3.3; ABr., VIII. 27, Oldenberg, *Religion des Veda*, p. 375, cf. Upadhyay, *op.cit*.
[73] Ved. Ind., II. p. 5.
[74] Manu, XI. 33.

The growing loss of the effectiveness of sacerdotalism relatively brought about an increased importance to the Upanisadic cultural values. The Brahmans, who excelled in spiritual status must have enjoyed a greater degree of independence than those who practised the dependent profession of priests. Manu lays down that although entitled to accept gifts, yet a Brahman should not, time and again, resort to it as his spiritual power acquired by the study of the Vedas is lost by accepting it.[75]

Brahmans, as royal chaplains, were inseparably associated with kingship right from the Vedic period. With the emergence of big kingdoms and empires from the 6th century B.C. there developed many a new political institution which required a large number of state officials to discharge secular duties. Brahmans in their relations to the state were no more exclusively concerned with the ritualistic responsibilities.

Authors of early Indian political texts invariably enjoin upon the king to carry on the administration of the state with the help of ministers. The qualifications of ministers laid down by these authors suited mostly to the upper classes and the attainments of the Brahmans particularly measure up to them.

Kautilya says that an ideal minister should be a native of the country, born of a high family, influential, well-trained in arts, possessed of foresight, wise, strong in memory, bold, eloquent, skilful, intelligent, possessed of enthusiasm, dignity and endurance, pure in character, affable, endowed with excellent strength, health and bravery, free from procrastination and fickle-mindedness and such qualities as excite hatred and enmity.[76] Manu prescribes the appointment of seven or eight ministers (sachiva) whose ancestors have been royal servants, who are versed in the sciences, skilled in the use of weapons, descended from whole noble families and who have royal ties.[77]

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[75] *Ibid.*, IV. 186.
[76] KA, I. 9.1; I.9.2-10.
[77] Manu, VII. 54.

Brahmans as ministers and counsellors played an important role in the political life of ancient India. According to the Kasika Vrtti, the term misra signified an agreement between the king and the Brahman regarding state administration.[78] The term panabandhasandhi marks their joint and unanimous commitment to the laws of dharma.[79] Again the term, Arya-Brahman, noble or honourable Brahman, was an honorific of the Brahman minister who performed Kshatriya like functions.[80]

Kalidasa also presents the king addressing the minister as Arya. Another term, Raja-Brahman denotes the Brahmans occupying big state offices.[81] In the Mahabharata also there is a mention of the Kshatriya like Brahmans who were employed in state administration.

As Brahmans took up political functions in the state administration in large numbers, a class of non-priestly Brahmans came into existence. Jayaswal observes: It is only in the days of the Buddha that we find Brahmans taking to political and public life of a change due probably to the growing dissatisfaction among the learned and intellectual class against the priestly vocation and also to a growth in population.[82]

Apart from these causes, the growth of big kingdoms with extensive state control over diverse walks of public life, as clearly represented in the Kautilyan Arthasastra, seems to have led to the secularization or democratization of the Brahman class which took up various non-ritualistic functions.

Learned Brahmans were employed by kings to interpret controversial points of law, custom, and dharma. The Jataka stories refer to Brahmans who worked as amaccas (amatyas), mahamattas (mahamatras), dutas (ambassadors), senapatis, issatthas or yoddhajivas (solidiers). According to the Mahaparinibbana Suttu, Ajatasatru had two Brahman ministers, Sunidha and Vassakara, the latter being the more celebrated one.

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[78] Astadhyayai, II. 154.

[79] *Kasika on Panini*, VI. 2.145. ed. Ananta Sastri Phadake (Banaras, 1931).

[80] Vide *Kasika Vritti on Panini*, VI. 2.58.

[81] *Ibid.*, 2.59, 2.145.

[82] Jayaswal, "Revised Notes on the Brahmin Empire", vide JBORS, 1918, IV, p. 262.

Kautilya, a great champion of monarchy, gave a place of honour to the varna-ashrama-dharma and orthodox religious system.[83] He seems to be harsh to the heterodox sects as he prescribes various sanctions against non-orthodox ascetic orders. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Buddhist traditions treat him contemptuously.

The occupational scheme of the orthodox social system did not approve of Brahmans taking to the profession of arms. But there is a clear evidence that sometimes they did take up arms. Baudhayana refers to Brahmans of the north who like other people subsisted on the profession of arms.[84]

All the Brahman dynasties which established their rule by virtue of their military power must have had distinguished soldiers and gallant fighters. They were also elevated to the position of military commanders. It served as a most important instrument in the exercise of political power.

Some Jataka stories also described a few Brahmans as Senapatis and Yodhajivis.[85] The Puranas, like the Dharmasastras, allow the Brahmans to take up arms under certain circumstances. Accordingly, they could hold high ranks of commanders of the army. This tradition of Brahmans engaged in the profession of arms upto the early medieval period.

Besides, the Brahmans were also found to be feudal lords. Huge land grants made to them for temple services became an important factor leading to the emergency of landlordism in ancient India. Exemption from revenue, transfer of administrative and judicial functions to the donee, started a typical vassal-lord relationship by the first century A.D.

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[83] Vide Sharma, APIIAI, p. 143.

[84] BDS, 1.1.2.4.

[85] R.N. Sharma, *Brahmins Through the Ages*, op.cit., pp. 125-26.

It seems that the disintegration of the centralised Mauryan administration and weakening of the Kautilyan spirit of rigid state control over land as found in Manusmriti marks the development of landlord-tenant relationship in those times.

The political role of Brahmans and their resort to the profession of arms, amounted to a flagrant violation of sacred laws. Their own scriptures exhorted them to scrupulously adhere to the tradition of sacred law. K.P. Jayaswal, with reference to the Sungan Coup, cites some passages of the Manusmriti and tries to prove that Manu attempted to justify or defend the Brahmans' role.[86]

Although Manu's militant assertion to the claim of Brahmanic superiority and that of the authority of the Vedas as interpreted by K.P. Jayaswal, fit in the general setting of historical events of the time, yet they do not carry conviction. One has to take into account the universal advocacy of the traditional varna obligations by all the contemporary authors, Manu being himself the foremost champion of the orthodox social system. He, nowhere, explicitly supports Brahmans taking up the profession of arms or their usurpation of political power.

Manu's contention that only the knower of the Vedas deserves the high post of commander-in-chief and headship of the state may be taken as a reassertion of traditional Vedic position which seeks to prescribe some knowledge of the Vedas to king and state officials, including the senapati.

It is difficult to believe that Manu seems to establish the supremacy of the Brahmans in temporal matters, when he says that they are the lords of the world. Inspite of his assertion of Brahmans' supremacy, Manu was also a great champion of the orthodox tradition. Any attempt on his part to justify the Brahmans' political role would have militated against the traditional social system, which invariably assigned the profession of arms and political role to the Kshatriya class. The

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[86] K.P. Jayaswal, *Manu and Yajnavalkya* (1930), Introduction, p. xxiiii.

Brahman law-givers dogmatically asserted the traditional class division and laid down that the duties and occupations typical to one class should not be generally followed by others.

The Hindu law-givers were strongly against Brahmans taking up political function of the Kshatriya. Only in abnormal times, the Brahmans or Vaisyas were allowed to take up arms. Baudhayana says, 'for the protection of cows, Brahmans, or in case of confusion of the varnas, Brahmans and Vaisyas also should take up arms out of the consideration for dharma.' Gautama allows the same whenever there is danger to life.

Manu clearly visualizes the emergent situations and ordains: 'Twice-borns should take up arms in the circumstances of the dharma being obstructed and a revolution (Vipalava) of the twice-born castes in evil times.' Manu, thus, provides for meeting the challenges to orthodox social and religious systems to be countered, if necessary, by the twice-born classes, by even taking up arms. The duty of protecting the people and dharma by all the varnas explains and justifies the Brahmans' political role.

The idea of duty of protection by all the varnas was further elaborated by law-givers in their speculation regarding the likely disintegration of varna systems characterized as the advent of kali yuga - the dark age. They prescribed that the restoration of varna ashrama-dharma was the task of all varns if the golden age of prosperity was to return.

Sociologically, the Brahman law-givers were legislating for a primitive society whose numerous sections were unadapted to change involved in a developed agricultural economy. The interpretation along this line assumed that in a primitive society where a large number of tribes clung to undeveloped economy which could not even provide a bare subsistence was completely incompatible with the Brahmanical orthodox solution for providing well-being through a varna functionalism.

The orthodox Brahmans had somewhat reacted against the Mauryan heterodoxy. Its positive expression appears to have come through the military channel. The fact is borne by the mutually contradictory and divergent Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions about Pusyamitra Sunga. The end of the Mauryan rule, followed by successions of Brahmanical orthodoxy, differed considerably in the initial stages from the heterodox fold in its appreciation of the dangers from foreign elements. The Brahmans' antipathy towards foreigners invited oppression for themselves at their hands. But later on the Brahmans came to terms with the alien people, and a process of assimilation of the latter into the orthodox society was set in.

However, the internal transformation of orthodoxy by the Brahmans in order to lead it to a sort of neo-orthodoxy of a catholic nature, represented by the Epics, the Smritis and the Puranas, was greatly facilitated on account of its positive patronage, rather than championship of its cause by the kings of the post-Mauryan age, whether belonging to the Brahman or neo-Brahman dynasties.

A tendency of secularization of the Brahman class appears to have grown in so far as they embraced secular professions of ministers, king's counsellors and even join military service in large number. Besides, by land grants made by kings in this period for the attainment of spiritual merit, a class of Brahman landlords also began to rise.

In fact, the varied roles of the Brahmans in the context of challenging situations, brought about important changes in norms, values and structures of socio-religious and political institutions.

The impulses of many-fold activities of the Brahmans came from their traditional status, which put on them definite obligations to occupy themselves and act in accordance with the needs of society. But an understanding of their roles in terms of cultural ethos reveals a paradox in their disposition. The emphasis on the Vedic tradition and attempts to preserve their cultural disposition in the face of antagonistic challenges was characterized by ethno-centricism. Their dealings with the non-varna people were marked by some aversion. Their rating of the ways and customs of these people by varna standards made their cultural ethos vedocentrical.

The very content of the synthesized neo-orthodoxy abounds in non-Vedic cultural elements, when considered in the context and their attempt to bring about the process of accommodation of the non-Vedic people of varied sorts within the orthodox fold. They broke the cultural exclusiveness of a puritan category. Thus, unleashing a liberal tendency.

The conscious move of the Brahmans to identify the orthodox cultural tradition with popular elements and the masses, and their own territorial mobility for economic reasons, brought about a great change in the cultural content of their fold.[87] The Brahmans' attempt at cultural transformation was closely associated with their supreme concern for establishing a well-ordered society.

As custodians of culture, they endeavoured "to grasp both the sources of stability and the seeds of change" — a challenging task for all thinkers at all times. The Brahmans' successful role in the context of meeting challenges of antagonistic forces was due to their ability to make a common cause with that of the political authority.

This may seem an extravagant claim of their supreme status, but it does reflect their early attempts to remain independent of the royal power. This claim was sought to be materialized by elevating the Brahman's spiritual power.

The priestly class could not free itself of kings autocratic treatment despite its attempts to consolidate the Purohita's office, by making it hereditary, the king had the discretion to appoint more than one Purohita and dismiss them at will.[88]

The Brahmans claimed independence from the royal power on the basis of their supreme ritual status. This was challenged by the pointed attacks of heterodoxy against the cult of sacrifice, ritual, and priestly pretensions. The secondary position of the office of royal chaplain in the times of Asoka was a final blow to his time-honoured priestly position.

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[87] R.N. Sharma, *Brahmins Through Ages*, op.cit.

[88] Ved. Ind., II, p. 5.

The growing loss of effective sacerdotalism brought about an increased importance of the Upanisadic cultural values. The Brahmans who excelled in spiritual status enjoyed a greater degree of independence than those who practised the dependent profession of priests. Manu lays down that though entitled to accept gifts, a Brahman should not frequently accept the same as it hampers his spiritual power acquired by the study of the Vedas.[89]

The superiority of the Brahman's position in the varna hierarchy was asserted in the ancient texts generally and in the Smriti literature particularly. The extra-emphasis on their superior status was repeatedly sought to be conditioned on and balanced by the imposition of moral and puritanic standards of life on them. There is a marked stress on the change in the relative importance of status evaluation where priority is accorded to Brahman's spiritual status over the ritual status. Even though the office of the royal chaplain was retained his position seems to have gone down. Besides adopting their time-honoured occupations and performing their traditional duties, the Brahmans started taking up avocations of lower ranks and consequently approximating themselves to the position of Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and even Sudras.

The position of the Kshatriyas was revitalized and the Brahmans attempted to move towards the monarchy in particular in the process of deribalization of the primitive social strata, which extended the political power of the king over them. The Brahman's bid to associate themselves with political power in a changing process of culture reconstruction revealed the aristocratic aspirations of the neo-orthodox cultural ideals and values.

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[89] Manu, IV. 186.

When one takes into consideration the complex factors responsible for the creation of the caste structure, the opinion that the Brahmans perpetuated the caste system for self-exaltation and self-aggrandisement seems to have been invalidated and falsified.

The Brahmans demonstrated in their attitude a blend of conservatism and dynamism reinforcing the trends of the cultural ideals cherished by the orthodox society in general and the Brahmans themselves in particular, thereby evincing a tolerably balanced disposition to the problem of society over the ages.

While attempting to safeguard their civil rights and privileges asserting their status along with their claims of immunity, the Brahmans tried to remain independent of social bindings. They helped the king to accumulate power but attempted to free themselves from royal control and endeavoured to ensure their independence in earlier times.

5

The Brahman and the Philosopher King

The political status of Brahmans in ancient India is by no means a unique phenomenon in the history of political thought and institutions. Theoretically, the intellectuals, whether they are called the Brahmans as in the varna-ashrama-dharma system, or philosopher king in Plato's *Republic*, or intellectual aristocracy in Aristotle's *Politics* or the modern intellectual elite have always been accorded the highest place in the society. This justifies an attempt to find an analogy and also point out contrasts in the role of intellectuals.

In all the philosophical writings of Plato, none of his ideas is so profoundly original and exceedingly interesting as his doctrine of the philosopher king. It is a plan carefully devised by him to save the society from death and decay. The main cause of ruination of every society - Athens or kali Age is the rule of incompetent, ignorant and self-seeking politicians.

Plato says, 'Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy ... cities will never have rest from their evils.' Thus the philosopher king is a deliberate creation of Plato to save the society from death and decay.

Plato's philosopher possesses philosophic nature. He is the source of love of beauty in the literary and artistic sense of the word. The philosophic element in man, then, is the essentially

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[1] C.L. Wayper, *Political Thought*, London, p. 16. The Greeks called Stasis (faction or sedition).

human element. It is what makes a man a man, and therefore in its fullness it implies a perfect humanity - a fully gifted human nature.

The orthodox Vedic culture was seriously menaced both by the heterodox movement exerting its influence from the east and the antagonistic social trend and foreign intrusion coming from the northwest of the Madhyadesa. The impact of these developments on social, religious, and political life of the society was far-reaching. The dark period is known as Kali Age in the Epic and the Puranas. Inspite of the possible exaggeration, the description betrays a sense of despondency among the Brahmans over the utter disintegration of the orthodox culture. Their great anxiety shows the sense of responsibility they felt as the custodian of the Vedic tradition.

Plato's philosopher king like the Brahman is a sage. By the rule of philosophy Plato means the rule of intellect. The philosopher like the Brahman is a man of simple habits and high thinking.

The philosopher is a lover of truth and has always a passion for reality.[2] It is by virtue of this disposition that he follows instinctive hatred against falsehood. He possesses self-control and is free from all sorts of meanness or spitefulness or little-mindedness which are inconsistent with such a nature.[3]

The Brahman is also the sole custodian of scriptures; he has the privilege to interpret law. He is also expected to lead a life of asceticism. Subjected as he is to a strictly iron discipline, every possible care is taken to protect him against all corrupting influences.

There is a striking similarity between the philosopher king and the Brahman. Manu describes the Brahmans as the mortal gods on earth. Plato also regards the philosopher king as the personification of knowledge and virtue. In Plato's views the society is safe only in the hands of the philosopher king. Manu expresses the same view by making other varnas dependent on the Brahman.

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[2] Plato, *The Republic*, Book V (485), Jowett's translation, p. 215.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

The ancient Indian literature describes the Kali Age as the evil age. The ancient law-givers like Manu and all other Epic writers emphasize the importance of varna-system as the basis of the ideal state. They emphatically say that there can be no peace and prosperity unless the learned and saintly Brahmans guide the working of the society.

There is a good deal of analogy between Plato's three-fold classification of the society and the four-fold classification which Manu offered in the *Manusmriti.*

'No two persons', Plato declares, "are born exactly alike, but each differs from other in endowments, one being suited for one occupation, and another for another.' His classification of the entire population into three classes, namely, men of gold, men of silver and men of iron, is determined by his concept of human nature. He believes that some are fit to rule, others to defend and the rest to produce. These three types of people are known as the ruling, defending and the producing classes.

Plato further says, 'Citizens, you are brothers, yet God has framed you differently. Some of you have the power of command, and in the composition of these, he has mingled gold wherefore they have the greatest honour; others he has made of silver, to be auxiliaries; others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen, he has composed of brass and iron, and the species will be preserved in the children.'[4]

The four-fold classification of men is made under the varna-system. The varna-system is the keynote of social organization. According to this system, society is divided into four varnas viz., the Brahman, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra.[5] These classes had maintained themselves in substance, hereditarily distinct, and also separate in occupations, pursuits and employment.

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[4] Plato, The Republic, Jawett's translation, Book III (415), p. 125.

[5] Manu, I. 31.

Varna-system in which the Brahmans occupy the highest position is much older than Plato's theory of philosopher king. It is possible to establish an analogy between the philosopher king and the Brahman of varna-system. But it is difficult to trace Plato's indebtedness to the philosophy of varna-ashrama-dharma.

Plato has carefully divorced economic and political power. He had seen with his own eyes the havoc wrought by the institution of private property. It tore the society into classes pitted one against the other, unleashed a tug of war, and created tension in social relationship which were based on extreme selfishness. The true Brahman would be one who is man of highest knowledge and virtues; he would lead a simple and spiritualist life quite away from mundane and material planes. The Kshatriya class i.e. the soldier class would run the administrative machinery under the guidance of the philosopher i.e., Brahman. The Vaisya would do the economic business.

The philosopher king possesses no property. He is a man of gold and therefore requires no gold as such. He is a personification of knowledge and selflessness. He requires no family which is based on element of selfishness and personal ego - which are the traits of men who represent appetite.

The Brahmans, on the other hand, are not debarred from property and family. Although, they are not materialistic yet they are supposed to accept material gifts in lieu of their spiritual services. The Brahmans are permitted to adopt Vaisya's profession in time of distress. They are also expected to take up arms in defence of dharma.

In addition to other sources of income, the Brahman enjoyed the privilege of receiving state income from fines[6] and a part of the wealth received by the king as presents.[7] Manu enjoins a king to ascertain the needs of Brahmans and check it that no Brahman suffered from the pang of hunger.[8]

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[6] Manu, IX. 323.

[7] *Ibid.*, II. 4.

[8] *Ibid.*, II. 21-22.

The Brahmans were exempted from taxes. Manu declares that though dying from want, a king must not levy taxes on Srotriyas residing in his kingdom, better die of hunger.[9]

The philosopher king is not .bound by customs and conventions, or a constitution or even his own laws - his powers are absolute and unlimited. Thus, laws and customs, which in Athenian society had an abiding place, are not at all recognized by Plato in the political and administrative scheme of the state.

Here, as elsewhere, it is the task of philosophy to substitute knowledge for belief, to discover the reasons for these rules and to approve or judge them in the light of reason.[10]

In this rule of intelligence there is no place for political selfishness and ignorance which had brought a complete ruin to the Athenian state of his day. To Plato, it is only through such a rule of knowledge that the real social progress of a society can be achieved.

The republic is eternally the voice of the scholar, the profession of faith of the intellectual, who sees in knowledge and enlightenment the forces upon which social progress must rely. It is in this sense that Plato accepts his master's dictum that "knowledge is virtue and ignorance is vice."

Thus the philosopher king is the fountain of law, so is the Brahman. The philosopher is the final authority to interpret law, similarly the Royal Purohita has the final say.

An important sphere of state activity where, according to the Smriti writers, the Brahmans exercised a good measure of influence was the judicial administration. According to Manu, the king, while discharging justice, was to be accompanied by Brahman assessors (sabhyas). In case the king failed personally to investigate suits he was to appoint a learned Brahman to try them. Only the learned Brahmans (sistas) had the right to interpret doubtful points of law. Both the Brahmans and the king enjoyed in collaboration the legislative power which itself had an extremely limited area of operation.

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[9] *Ibid.*, VII. 134.

[10] M.B. Foster, *Masters of Political Thought*, Vol. I, London, 1956, p. 106.

Some writers believe that king's power of legislation was seriously limited. He could make no law overriding dharma. In fact, royal edict was to be merely declaratory and not innovative. The Brahmans holding the power of interpretation, it appears, had an edge over the king in matters of legislation. Quoting the opinion of Medhatithi, Derrett writes, "The king ... is concerned with the state of the kingdom but the Brahman with relieving people's doubts as to rights and duties. The king's concern is to administer punishment. The Brahman, however, is to see that the judgement is correct. This would serve to put the matter in a nutshell".

Though both the Brahman and the philosopher king enjoy supreme positions, but their superiority rests on different grounds. Brahman belongs to ancient India and the philosopher king is the product of Greek mind.

The essence of ancient Indian thought is dharma. Neither the Brahman nor the Kshatriya king is above dharma. Whereas the words of the philosopher king are the highest codes of rationality and morality.

The very idea of analogy is not to compare and contrast the two different cultures, but to point out the rule of intelligence, i.e., the supremacy of knowledge. And the accordance of high position to the custodians of knowledge.

The philosopher king is a man of unquestionable and unimpeachable integrity. He earns this title through a long and tough process of education till thirty-five years of age and another fifteen years of trial of asceticism, purity and positive renunciation. He is not a philosopher by birth. Although the varna-system is categorical and emphatic about the functional aspects of division of the society yet due weightage is given to the factor of birth.

Although there are some variations in the role of the philosopher king and that of the Brahman purohit, yet in the ultimate analysis, there is a close analogy between the two. The three-fold classification is the basis of the ideal state. This classification is rationally and ethically justified and this alone can ensure a sound basis of a peaceful and happy society.

The varna system that divides the society into four varnas, is much older than the Republic. The Vedic and other ancient religious literature support the assumption that varna is a universal law of nature. If this law of varna is to be applied to the benefit of humanity then it becomes necessary to separate a particular group of people coming together with a certain aim from the rest of the gathered mass of population. This implies that every social system is divided into classes for the progress of humanity.

The Greek political culture represents the finest intellectual tradition in the West. Werner Jedgar states in "Paideia the ideals of Greek Culture" that the Greek tradition was based on the belief in the highest power of the mind. However, the ancient Indian political tradition and culture drew inspiration from spiritual convictions and divine power which superseded rational category of human progress. The Greek intellectualism is materialist whereas the ancient Brahmanic literature is spiritualist. Naturally, the Greek stressed on life of plenty and material happiness whereas the ancient Brahmanic literature embodies the ideals of asceticism, and transcendentalism through renunciation and meditation.

The Greek ideal of wisdom as the highest intellectual attainment stands in sharp contradistinction to Brahmanic concept of Gyan which is fundamentally a spiritual experience, and not merely an intellectual activity. It involves the highest integration of body, mind and spirit.

This does not however mean that the Brahmanical thinking shunned the material world altogether. It accepts the institution of grahastha which implied acceptance of sensual enjoyment. But this is a passing phase to be followed by vanaprastha and ultimately sanyasa. The central theme is renunciation, reflection and meditation as a mode of experience. The best Greek political tradition and culture emphasized on logical and rational construction of the society.

The Greek mind does not appeal to divine authority or superhuman power. Therefore, even Plato's philosopher king is inadequate, drastically limited and structurally and functionally deficient, having a restricted pattern of experiences and incapable of grasping the totality., Plato finally lands up in metaphysics. But the Brahmans are able to explain mysteries of life and death, the nature of man and God. All this cannot be merely intellectually explained away or experienced.

The enlightened and self-conscious Brahman was supposed to command knowledge not merely as intellectual activity but as intuitive and spiritual experience. While the Greek master demanded rigourous exercise and discipline of the intellect as an instrument of knowledge, the ancient Brahman felt that true knowledge consisted of self-consciousness and enlightenment of the soul which required moments of peace, harmony, tranquility, contemplation and lofty serenity.

Apparently, there is a striking resemblance between Plato's three-fold classification of society into intellectuals, warriors and workers and the Vedic concept of Chaturvarna comprising of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. Yet the two are in reality founded on radically different assumptions of reason and spirit and sum up opposite traditions of conceptual insight and world view.

The varna-system in which the Brahmans occupy the highest position is much older than Plato's theory of philosopher king. Although it is possible to establish an analogy between the philosopher king and the Brahmans, yet it is difficult to trace Plato's indebtedness to the philosophy of varna-ashrama-dharma. The very idea of analogy is not to compare and contrast the two different cultures but to point out the supremacy of the custodians of knowledge.

Conclusion

The study reveals that final conclusions regarding ancient Indian political concepts cannot be claimed. We have no intention to claim originality in analyzing Brahmanism as a political concept. But this subject has potentiality for further research.

Political concepts are always a product of social milieu and general intellectual environment. MacIver, an American sociologist, has rightly said that the state exists within the society. The political is a part of the social. Logically, the political Brahman is a part of the social Brahman. The enquiry reveals the political status and role of the Brahmans in the light of socio-philosophical cultural traditions of ancient India.

We have followed historical-cum-philosophical approach in our study. This also explains as well as justifies the incorporation of chapter 1 and chapter 3 in the book. Although concrete facts of history do help in theorization, yet in the case of ancient India there is an ocean of theological and philosophical literature which has helped us in analyzing and interpreting the political role of the Brahmans.

Brahmanism as a political concept postulates a theory of the role of Brahmans in ancient India. The nature of their political role i.e., the extent, significance and importance of their participation in the activities of the state, has been viewed within the socio-religious framework of the Hindus. Political matters have been treated as a part of human activities which are intrinsically connected with the problems of human destiny and moral and spiritual values.

The study reveals that the Brahmans held a prominent place in almost all the important domains of life. In the field of culture, our most precious heritage is what the Brahmans made it. In political matters, nothing was possible without the advice of the counsellors who used to be largely Brahmans. The importance of the Brahman class is well-acknowledged by Manu. The king of Manu's ideal state follows the advice of Brahman and it is expected that he shall never go against it.

The traditional cultural development fused the Brahman and Kshatriya classes into an inseparable bond of mutual cooperation. In the early stages of the Vedic society, the Brahman priest and the Kshatriyas, closely distinct on occupational basis, emerged as the Brahma and Ksyatra powers, collaborating actively in the cultural struggle against the non-Aryan elements. The priestly class was associated with the Vedic state, whether republican or monarchical. In ancient times, ritual ceremonies were a part of the public life. This raised the priestly class to a distinct position in the society. The priest, through the agency of rituals in the coronation ceremony could raise the king above tribal control. The evolution of sacerdotalism marks the development of monarchical polity to a considerable extent.

The means and methods adopted for seizing controls of power differed from one varna to another in accordance with the ascribed role of each varna - within the traditional varna framework (the Vedic Purusasukta theory of social differentiations which had acquired sanctity and theoretical acceptance). The Brahman's method was sastric. As the repository of sastric knowledge he claimed the exclusive right to interpret and in effect to determine the rules of conduct including the conduct of the state. In the capacity of Purohita or rajguru, he controlled legislative and judicial machinery through his right to interpret dharma.

The religious life of the society completely and the intellectual life very largely, were dominated by the Brahmans through their exclusive right to priestation and teaching.

CONCLUSION

Socially or politically, a wide gulf of powers and privileges separated the Brahmans from the rest of the people.

In all probability, the function of an individual and not his birth determined his varna. One could cross over to the priestly ranks from the noble ranks. The Brahman was one who composed and recited the Brahman (prayers). However, with the passage of time, the varna-system gradually changed and assumed a somewhat rigid form which further stiffened in the post-Vedic literature. The Rgveda, Atharvaveda and the Brahmana texts put Brahmans above all other social groups. With sacrifices becoming more and more complex, the Brahmans acquired still greater prestige and power. No one but a Brahman could now officiate as a priest at a sacrifice.

The Sutras also throw light on the obligations, the duties, and the social position of Brahmans who were enjoined to perform three duties i.e., study, performing sacrifices and giving gifts.

The Buddhist and Jain texts present a somewhat different picture. They show the kshatriyas to be superior to Brahman, but they also reflect the generally respected position held by the Brahmans in the society.

Kautilya wrote a manual of statecraft and not a smriti. He restrained his enthusiasm for Brahman superiority to practical limits. He takes away their immunity from punishment in cases of rape, theft, murder, etc. In one case, he even prescribes capital punishment for the Brahman. Nevertheless, the position of Brahmans remained one of super eminence in the society. This position might have received some setback during the ascendancy of Buddhism under Asoka. But with Pusyamitra, inaugurating a Brahman dynasty, they rapidly restored to themselves the enviable position they had lost. They once again reached a pinnacle of glory under the Guptas, and started calling themselves, bhu-devas i.e., deities on earth. They continued enjoying this position for quite sometime and remained unquestioned custodians of India's moral values. In fact the prominent role played by the Brahmans has continued ever since.

Through ages, they have been respected as the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the Hindu society.

In the course of time, values associated with Brahmanism have declined. As a result, we are left with a tribe of Brahmans many of whom are neither intellectuals nor spiritual men. The orthodox school does not consider the modern intellectual elite as a replica of ancient Brahmans. The main argument is that the modern intelligentsia lacks the virtues of asceticism and ethical standards. Today, the intellectual is crazy after material pursuits and mundane values. His love for wealth and political power compels him to make all sorts of compromises.

With the exceptions of Brahmans in the ancient Hindu society, the intellectuals are often denied a place which rationally and morally belongs to them. If the intellectual leadership had really occupied a highest position in practical affairs of the state, then Plato might not have written his *The Republic*. The Greek Master was at pains to see selfish, ignorant and incompetent persons at the helm of affairs.

The capitalist society of today allows the intellectual leadership only a secondary position and the socialist society has established in practice the dictatorship of the shrewd communist politicians. The place which the *Manusmriti* gives to the Brahman class, or the one that The Republic gives to the philosopher king is denied to the intellectual leadership in both the capitalist as well as the socialist societies.

Marx's View

Marx asserts that the capitalist society has combined economic and political power in the hands of a class which is anything but intellectual. The bourgeoisie can always hire the services of technical experts and experienced administrators. But the ultimate strings of power are in the hands of the bourgeoisie who has many options. Like Manu and Plato, Marx also is against concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a few which is bound to create division and strife in the society. The economically strong class is determined to control gubernatorial machinery for exploitative use.

The Marxian interpretation, however, cannot be applied to the ancient Hindu society which was based on the law of varna-ashrama-dharma, which is spiritual in essence and not exploitative in the economic sense of the term. The capitalist society which earned the wrath of Marx, is a complete distortion of the spiritual Hindu society of ancient India. The varna system, with the passage of time got distorted and assumed the condemnable form of Jati system. Marx condemned the caste system as well as the economic classification of the society because both are exploitative in nature.

The game of power politics is the most unscrupulous and treacherous. To quote Johnson, 'Politics is the last resort of a scoundrel.' The intellectuals fight shy in entering politics because it calls for compromises at every step. Who gets, what, when and how is a matter of political manoeuvrebility.

Manu's Brahman or Plato's philosopher king has little chance of success in the present ratrace for power. Spiritual knowledge and ethical standards are defeated by expediency and opportunism. As a result, the intellectuals are feeling terribly disgusted today.

The cycle of history keeps on moving. It has given every varna its turn to control political power. The Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras (i.e., classes representing intellect, sword, wealth and labour respectively) have controlled the reign of power. The supremacy of the Brahmans was replaced by supremacy of the Kshatriyas. The political set-up gradually became more complex as the small states were replaced by big empires. This historical role was performed by Kshatriya kings like Samudragupta and others in India.

The modern capitalist society has brought the Vaisya class to the forefront and reduced Kshatriyas to a secondary position. At one time the empires were built with sword to fulfil the personal ambitions of kings but the capitalist class established its unchallenged hegemony both at national and international levels. The idea underlying modern imperialism is economic exploitation of weaker nations.

However, this is not the end of the dialectics of power. The working class (not exactly the Sudras) established its dictatorship in practically half of the world and set aside the hegemony of the Vaisya class. The East European states have witnessed dramatic changes. Will this be the end of the cycle of political power? What is the ultimate end the world is moving to? It is beyond prediction.

Glossary

Acharya	Teacher, Preceptor
Adeva	Hostile to gods, not divine, impious
Adhvaryu	Priest learned in Yajurveda
Advaita	Oneness, not dual (the identity of Brahma and the universe or of spirit and matter)
Agni	Fire, God of Fire
Agnidh	Fire Kuidler (Priest)
Aila	Name of Pururavas (son of Ila and Budha cordomom Plant)
Aitareya	Name of the Brahmana - a Vedic work
Ajigarta	Name Serpent
Akratu	Powerless
Amatyas	Ministers
Ambastha	Child of a Brahman and a woman of the Vaishya tribe
Anas	Cart, boiled rice, living being
Angas	Body limit, a part or portion
Anusasana	Discipline
Antyaya	Untouchable, one of the seven inferior tribes; Chandala etc.
Anvyakhyana	Subsequent, statement, explanation
Arya-Brahmana	Worthy, respectable Brahman
Aryans	Noblemen
Asiva	Evil, inauspicious, unfortunate
Asuras	Demons
Asvamedha	Horse sacrifice
Athar-Vangiras	Families of Atharvan and Angiras
Atri	Name of a celebrated sage and author of many Vedic hymns

JBBRAS	Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
JBORS	Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society
KA	Kautilya Arthasastra or kautilya's Arthasastra
KSam.	Kathaka Samhita
Mat. P.	Matsya Purana
Mbh.	Mahabharata
MSam.	Maitrayani Samhita
OGCI	Origin and Growth of Caste in India
OST	Original Sanskrit Texts
PBr.	Panchavimsa Brahmana
Pr. Up.	Prasna Upanisad
QJAHS	Quarterly Journal of Andhra Historical Society
Raghu.	Raghuvamsa
Ramay.	Ramayana
RV	Rgveda
RPVU	Religion and Philosophy of Vedas and Upanisads
SBE (SB.)	Sacred Books of the East
SBr.	Satapatha Brahmana
SSSut.	Sankhayana Srauta Sutra
TBr.	Taittiriya Brahmana
TMBr.	Tandya Mahabrahmana
TSam.	Taittiriya Samhita
Vas.	Vajasaneyi Samhita
Vas. DH.	Vaikhanasa Dharma Prasna (Vaikh. Dh. Pr.)
VDS	Vasistha Dharma Sutra
Ved. Ind.	Vedic Index of Names and Subjects
Vis.	Vishu
Vis. P.	Visnu Purana
Vis. Sm.	Visnu Smriti
Yaj.	Yajnavalkyasmriti
Yaj. Sm.	Yajnavalkyasmriti

Avarna	Blame
Avrata	Not dutiful, not observing the prescribed religious rites.
Bharadvaja	Name of Droṇa- the military preceptor of the Kauravas and Pandavas
Bhuta-Yajana	Offering to all beings, one of the Yajnas to be performed by a householder
Brahman	Learned, one of the first of the four original castes of the Hindus.
Brahma-vidya	Knowledge of the supreme spirit
Brhmodya	Explaining the Veda, manifestation of Brahma or treatment of theological problems
Daiva	Fate, divine
Daksina	Donation in general, a present or gift to Brahmans at the completion of a religious rite
Dandaniti	Judicial administration, the science of politics
Dasas	Slaves
Devajanavidya	Knowledge or vidya of Brahmans
Deva-Yajana	Sacrifice to gods
Devaputras	Sons of gods
Dharma	Religion, moral virtue, law, religion, duty
Dravidians	Inhabitants of a country or tribe i.e., Dravida
Dutas	Messenger
Dvija	Twice-born, a member of upper castes
Dvijati	Twice-born, a member of upper castes
Dvijatis	Twice-born, a member of upper castes
Gana	Song
Gana	Group, a series, a body of attendants
Gatha	Verse, a prakrit dialect
Gotra	Race or family
Gotras	Races or families

Abbreviations

ABr.	Aitareya Brahmana
ADS	Apastamba Dharma Sutra
AHIPI	A History of Indian Political Ideas
ASWI	Archaeological Survey of Western India
AV	Atharvaveda
B.	Brahmana
BDS	Baudhayana Dharma Sutra
BE	Bombay Edition
Bhag. P.	Bhagavata Purana
Br. Up.	Brhadaranyaka Upanisad
Ch. Up.	Chandogya Upanisad
DKA	Dynasties of the Kali Age
EI	Epigraphia Indica
ERE	Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics
ESS	Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences
Gaut.	Gautama Dharmasuta Dharma
GDS	Gautama Dharma Sutra
HDS	History of Dharmasastras
HIL	History of Indian Literature
Hir. Gr.	Hiranyakesin Grhya Sutra
HP	Hindu Polity
IA	Indian Antiquary
IHC (Proc.)	Indian History Congress Proceedings
IHQ	Indian Historical Quarterly
JAOS	Journal of American Oriental Society
JASB	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
Jat.	Jataka
JBAS	Journal of Bengal Asiatic Society

Grhya	Perceptible, connected with
Guilds-Sreni	Company of traders and artisans etc.
Guna	Quality
Hetu	Cause, purpose
Hota	Sacrificer, priest especially one who recites the prayers of the Rgveda
Hotr	Sacrificer, priest, offering oblation with fire
Indra	A deity of rain, Lord of Gods
Itihasa	History
Itihass	Legendary or traditional account of events etc.
Janapada	District, country, province
Jatakas	Story of former births
Jatis	Race, community, caste
Jatitah	From race, community, caste
Kalpa	Age, 1000 Yugas being a period of 432 million years of mortals and measuring the duration of the world
Kalpa	Kalpa one of the six Vedangas
Kalyuge	Kali age (The fourth age of the world consisting of 4,32,000 years of men)
Kastra	Dominion, a man of the Kshatriya caste
Katha	Story
Kavi	Poet
Ksatra-vidya	Military Science
Kula	Family, herd, community
Mahamatras	Very effective spell
Mahamattys	Chief Ministers
Mana	Mind
Mana	Honour
Mahayajans	Great sacrifice
Manasoavesu	In the swiftness or speed of mind
Misra	Mixed
Mixture of varnas	Confusion of caste through intermarriage

Mlecchas	Foreigners in general, a barbarian, a non-Aryan
Naksatra	Star
Narasamsi	Name
Nestr	One of the chief officiating priest at a soma sacrifice
Nidhi	Treasure
Nisada	Hunter, name of one of the wild tribes in India
Nivrtti Dhayama	Resignation of wordly acts and emotions
Nivrtti Paths	Cessation
Panabandha-Sandhi	Making a treaty or peace
Panca-Mahayajnas	Five great sacrifices
Paneajana	Traders generally of Vaishya caste
Parisada	Assembly
Pitra	Parents, ancestor, manes
Pitr-Yajana	Sacrifice to the manes
Political Order	
Rajdharma	Duties of a king
Potr	One of the sixteen officiating priest at a sacrifice, i.e., assistant of the priest called Brahman
Pranas	Breath, respiration, vital airs being five as Prana, Apana, Samana, Vyana and Udana
Prasastr	Administrator
Pravars	Upper garment, ancestors
Pravrtti	Engaging in
Purohita	Priest
Purusa	Male, person
Raja-Brahman	Royal priest
Rajarisis	A man of Kshatriya caste who, by his pious life, is regarded as a sage or rishi
Rajasa	The quality of Rajas or Endowed with passion

Rajasuya	Royal sacrifice, a great sacrifice performed by a universal monarch at the time of his coronation as a mark of his undisputed sovereignty
Rasi	Heap, astrological house
Risis	Sages, seers
Rsiyajana	Sacrifice to the seers
Rtvija	Priest who officiates at a sacrifice the four chief Rituijas are Hotr, Udgotra, Adhuaryu and Brahman
Sachiva	Minister, Counsellor
Sakhyah	Friendship
Samhita	Collection, code
Samyajante	They sacrifice
Satpathe	Right way
Satvika	Related to purity, vigorous
Savitri	Name of the wife of Satyavana, king of Salva
Savitri	Name of a celebrated verse of the Rgveda it is also called Gayatri
Savrna	Of same caste or colour
Shastrartha	Discussion, debate
Soldiers	Contestant, warrior
Srishti	Creation
Srmanas	A devotee, Buddhist ascetic
Sritriya	Learned in the Vedas, teachable
Sudra	A man of the servile class
Taittiriya	The followers of the Taittiriya School of the Yajurveda
Tamasa	Ignorance, relating to Tamas i.e., the quality of darkness
Tapas	Penance
Vaisya	Trader
Vajapeya	A name of a particular sacrifice draught of strength

Vamadeva	Name of a sage, or Lord Siva
Varna dharma	Duties of the castes
Varnamala	Alphabets
Varnamkara	Maker of the varnas or castes
Varnas	castes, colours
Varnasamakara	Destroyer of the varnas or castes
Varna-samkara	Hybrid descendant
Varna-ashrma-dharma	Caste, duties and four stages of life
Varna-vyavastha	Arrangement of castes
Vasava	Indra, i.e. god of rain
Vayu	Wind, air
Vidatha	Order, assembly. It means a learned man
Vipra	Wise Brahman
Vis	House, Vaishya
Visvamitra	Name of celebrated sage
Vritra	Name of a demon killed by Indra
Vrtra	Name
Vyawastha	Arrangement
Yavana	Greek, foreigner

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